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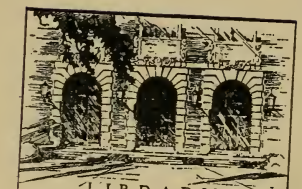

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# THE WHITE CHIEF

## A Legend of Northern Mexico.

BY

CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,

AUTHOR OF

"RIFLE-RANGERS," "SCALP-HUNTERS," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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# THE WHITE CHIEF.

## CHAPTER I.

Deep in the interior of the American Continent—more than a thousand miles from the shores of any sea—lies our scene.

Climb with me yonder mountain, and let us look from its summit of snow.

We have reached its highest ridge. What do we behold?

On the north, a chaos of mountains, that continues on through thirty parallels to the

shores of the Arctic Sea! On the south, the same mountains,—here running in separate sierras, and there knotting with each other. On the west, mountains again, profiled along the sky, and alternating with broad tables that stretch between their bases.

Now turn we around, and look eastward. Not a mountain to be seen! Far as the eye can reach, and a thousand miles farther, not a mountain. Yonder dark line rising above the plain is but the rocky brow of another plain—a *steppe* of higher elevation.

Where are we? On what summit are we standing? On the Sierra Blanca, known to the hunter as the "Spanish Peaks." We are upon the western rim of the *Grand Prairie*.*

Looking eastward, the eye discovers no

* For explanatory notes the reader is referred to the Appendix at the end of the third volume.

signs of civilisation. There *are* none within a month's journeying. North and south,—mountains, mountains.

Westward, it is different. Through the telescope we can see cultivated fields afar off,—a mere strip along the banks of a shining river. Those are the settlements of Nuevo Mexico, an oäsis irrigated by the Rio Del Norte. The scène of our story lies not there.

Face once more to the eastward, and you have it before you. The mountain upon which we stand has its base upon a level plain that expands far to the east. There are no foothills. The plain and the mountain touch, and at a single step you pass from the naked turf of the one to the rocky and pine-clad declivities of the other.

The aspect of the plain is varied. In some places it is green, where the gramma grass has formed a sward; but in most parts

it is sterile as the Saära. Here it appears brown, where the sun-parched earth is bare; there it is of a sandy, yellowish hue; and yonder the salt effervescence renders it as white as the snow upon which we stand.

The scant vegetation clothes it not in a livery of verdure. The leaves of the agave are mottled with scarlet, and the dull green of the cactus is still further obscured by its thickly-set spines. The blades of the yuccas are dimmed by dust, and resemble clusters of half-rusty bayonets; and the low scrubby copses of acacia scarce offer a shade to the dusky *agama* and the ground rattlesnake. Here and there a solitary palmetto, with branchless stem and tufted crown, gives an African aspect to the scene. The eye soon tires of a landscape where every object appears angular and thorny; and upon this plain, not only are the trees of that character, but the

plants,—even the very grass carries its thorns!

With what sensations of pleasure we turn to gaze into a lovely valley, trending eastward from the base of the mountain! What a contrast to the arid plain! Its surface is covered with a carpet of bright green, enamelled by flowers that gleam like many-coloured gems; while the cotton-wood, the wild china-tree, the live-oak, and the willow, mingle their foliage in soft shady groves, that seem to invite us. Let us descend!

We have reached the plain, yet the valley is still far beneath us—a thousand feet at the least—but, from a promontory of the bluff, projecting over it, we command a view of its entire surface to the distance of many miles. It is a level, like the plain above; and gazing down upon it, one might fancy it a portion of the latter, that had sunk into

the earth's crust, so as to come within the influence of a fertilising power, denied to the higher region.

On both sides of it, far as the eye can reach, run the bordering cliffs, stepping from one level to the other, by a thousand feet sheer, and only passable at certain points. There is a width of ten miles from cliff to cliff; and these, of equal height, seem the counterparts of each other. Their grim savage fronts, overhanging the soft bright landscape of the valley, suggest the idea of a beautiful picture framed in rough oak-work.

A stream, like a silver serpent, bisects the valley,—not running in a straight course, but in luxuriant windings, as though it loved to tarry in the midst of that bright scene. Its frequent curves and gentle current show that it passes over a surface almost plane. Its banks are timbered, but not continuously.

Here the timber forms a wide belt, there only a fringe scarce shadowing the stream, and yonder the grassy turf can be distinguished running in to the very water's edge.

Copse-like groves are scattered over the ground. These are of varied forms; some perfectly circular, others oblong or oval, and others curving like the cornucopiæ of our gardens. Detached trees meet the eye, whose full round tops show that Nature has had her will in their development. The whole scene suggests the idea of some noble park, planted by design, with just timber enough to adorn the picture without concealing its beauties.

Is there no palace, no lordly mansion, to correspond? No. Nor palace nor cottage sends up its smoke. No human form appears within this wild paradise. Herds of deer roam over its surface, the stately elk reposes within the shade of its leafy groves, but no

human being is there. Perhaps the foot of man never ——

Stay! there is one by our side, who tells a different tale. Hear him.

"That is the valley of San Ildefonso. Wild though it appears, it was once the abode of civilised man. Near its centre you may note some irregular masses scattered over the ground. But for the trees and rank weeds that cover them, you might there behold the ruins of a city.

"Yes! on that spot once stood a town, large and prosperous. There was a *Presidio* with the flag of Spain flying from its battlements; there was a grand mission-house of the Jesuit Padrés; and dwellings of rich miners and 'haciendados' studded the valley far above and below. A busy populace moved upon the scene; and all the passions of love and hate, ambition, avarice, and revenge, have had existence there. The hearts stirred by them

are long since cold, and the actions to which they gave birth are not chronicled by human pen. They live only in legends that sound more like romance than real history.

"And yet these legends are less than a century old! One century ago, from the summit of yonder mountain could have been seen, not only the settlement of San Ildefonso, but a score of others—cities, and towns, and villages—where to-day the eye cannot trace a vestige of civilisation. Even the names of these cities are forgotten, and their histories buried among their ruins!

"The Indian has reeked his revenge upon the murderers of Moctezuma! Had the Saxon permitted him to continue his war of retaliation, in one century more—nay, in half that time—the descendants of Cortez and his conquerors would have disappeared from the land of Anahuac!

"Listen to the 'Legend of San Ildefonso!'"

## CHAPTER II.

Perhaps in no country has religion so many devoted days as in Mexico. The "fiestas" are supposed to have a good effect in Christianizing the natives, and the saints' calendar has been considerably enlarged in that pseudo-holy land. Nearly every week supplies a festival, with all its mummery of banners, and processions, and priests dressed as if for the altar-scene in "Pizarro," and squibs, and fireworks, and silly citizens kneeling in the dust, and hats off all round. Very much like a London Guy-Fawkes procession is the whole affair, and of about like influence upon the morals of the community.

Of course the *padrés* do not get up these ceremonial exhibitions for mere amusement—not they. There are various little "blessings," and "indultos," and sprinklings of sacred water, to be distributed on these occasions—not *gratuitously*—and the wretched believer is preciously "plucked" while he is in the penitent mood—at the same time he is promised a short and easy route to heaven.

As to any solemnity in the character of the ceremonials, there is nothing of the sort. They are in reality days of amusement; and it is not uncommon to see the kneeling devotee struggling to keep down the cackle of his fighting-cock, which, full-galved, he carries under the folds of his *serapé!* All this under the roof of the sacred temple of God!

On days of fiesta the church genuflexions are soon over; and then the gambling-booth, the race-course, bull-baiting, the cock-pit, and

various minor amusements, come into full operation. In all these you may meet the robed priest of the morning, and stake your dollar or doubloon against his, if you feel so inclined.

"San Juan" is one of the "*fiestas principales*"—one of the most noted of Mexican ceremonials. On this day—particularly in a *New* Mexican village—the houses are completely deserted. All people turn out, and proceed to some well-known locality, usually a neighbouring plain, to witness the sports—which consist of horse-racing, "tailing the bull," "running the cock," and the like. The intervals are filled up by gambling, smoking, and flirtation.

There is much of republican equality exhibited on these occasions. Rich and poor, high and low, mingle in the throng, and take part in the amusements of the day.

* * * *

It is the day of San Juan. A broad grassy plain lies just outside the town of San Ildefonso, and upon this the citizens are assembled. It is the scene of the festival, and the sports will soon begin. Before they do, let us stroll through the crowd, and note its component parts.

All classes of the community — in fact, all the community — appear to be present. There go the two stout *padrés* of the mission, bustling about in their long gowns of coarse serge, with bead-string and crucifix dangling to their knees, and scalp-lock close shaven. The Apaché will find no trophy on their crowns.

There is the *cura* of the town church, conspicuous in his long black cloak, shovel hat, black silk stockings, pumps, and buckles. Now smiling benignly upon the crowd, now darting quick Jesuitical glances from his dark

ill-meaning eyes, and now playing off his white jewelled fingers, as he assists some newly-arrived "señora" to climb to her seat. Great "ladies' men" are these same black-gowned bachelor-churchmen of Mexico.

We have arrived in front of several rows of seats, raised above one another. Let us observe who occupy them. At a glance it is apparent they are in possession of the "*familias principales,*" the aristocracy of the settlement. Yes—there is the rich "*commerciante,*" Don Jose Rincon, his fat wife, and four fat sleepy-looking daughters. There, too, is the wife and family of the "Alcalde," and this magistrate himself with tasselled official staff; and the Echevarrias — pretty creatures that they think themselves — under care of their brother, the beau, who has discarded the national costume for the *mode de Paris!* There is the rich "*haciendado,*" Señor Gomez del Monté, the

owner of countless flocks and broad acres in the valley; and there are others of his class with their señoras and señoritas. And there, too, observed of all, is the lovely Catalina de Cruces, the daughter of Don Ambrosio, the wealthy miner. He will be a lucky fellow who wins the smiles of Catalina, or rather, perhaps, the good graces of her father—for Don Ambrosio will have much to say in the matter of her marriage. Indeed, it is rumoured that that matter is already arranged; and that Captain Roblado, second in command at the Presidio, is the successful suitor. There stands he, in full moustache, covered with gold lace, back and front, and frowning fiercely on every one who dares to rest eye for a moment upon the fair Catalina. With all his gold lace and gallant strut, Catalina displays no great taste in her choice;—but is he her choice? Maybe not—maybe

he is the choice of Don Ambrosio; who, himself of plebeian origin, is ambitious that his blood should be mingled with that of the military hidalgo. The soldier has no money—beyond his pay; and that is mortgaged for months in advance; but he is a true *Gachupino*, of "blue blood," a genuine "hija de algo." Not a singular ambition of the old miser, nor uncommon among parvenus.

Vizcarra, the Commandante, is on the ground—a tall colonel of forty—laced and plumed like a peacock. A lively bachelor is he; and while chatting with padré, cura, or alcalde, his eye wanders to the faces of the pretty *poblanas* that are passing the spot. These regard his splendid uniform with astonishment, which he, fancying himself "Don Juan Tenorio," mistakes for admiration, and repays with a bland smile.

There, too, is the third officer—there are

but the three — the *teniente*, Garcia by name. He is better-looking, and consequently more of a favourite with both poblanas and rich señoritas, than either of his superiors. I wonder the fair Catalina does not give her preference to him. Who can tell that she does not? A Mexican dame does not carry her soul upon her sleeve, nor upon her tongue neither.

It would be a task to tell of whom Catalina is thinking just now. It is not likely at her age—she is twenty—that her heart is still her own; but whose? Roblado's? I would wager, no. Garcia's? That would be a fairer bet. After all, there are many others—young "haciendados," employés of the mines, and a few merchant dandies of the town. Her choice may be some one of these. *Quien sabe?*

Let us on through the crowd!

We see the soldiers of the garrison, with

tinkling spurs and long trailing sabres, mingling fraternally with the serapé-clad tradesmen, the *gambucinos*, and *rancheros* of the valley. They imitate their officers in strut and swagger —the very character of which enables one to tell that the military power is here in the ascendant. They are all dragoons—infantry would not avail against an Indian enemy—and they fancy that the loud clinking of their spurs, and the rattle of their steel scabbards, add greatly to their importance. They have their eyes after the poblanas, and the sweethearts of the poblanas keep their eyes after them in a constant vigil of jealousy.

The "poblanas" are the pretty girls of the place; but, pretty or plain, all the girls are out to-day in their best and gayest apparel. Some wear *enaguas* of blue—others of scarlet—others of purple; and many of them tastefully flounced at the bottoms with a trim-

ming of narrow lace. They wear the embroidered chemisette, with its snow-white frills, and the blueish *reboso* gracefully arranged, so as to conceal neck, bosom, arms, and, in some cases of coquetry, even the face! Ere night this jealous garment will have lost half its prudery. Already the prettier faces peep forth; and you may see, from the softness of the complexion, that they have been just washed free of the "allegria" that for the last two weeks has rendered them hideous.

The "rancheros" are in their full and beautiful costume—velveteen trousers, wide at the bottoms and open up the sides; *botas* of unstained leather; jackets of tanned sheepskin, or velveteen richly embroidered; fancy-worked shirts underneath, and scarfs of rich red silk around the waist. Over all the broad-brimmed *sombrero*, of black glaze, with silver or gold band, and tags of the same, screwed into the

crown. Some have no jacket, but the serapé, hanging negligently from their shoulders, serves in place of one. All of these men have horses with them; and on their feet may be seen spurs full five pounds in weight, with rowels three, four, and even five inches in diameter!

The "gambucinos," and young men of the town, the smaller trades-people, are very similarly attired; but those of higher class—the officials and "commerciantes"—are clad in broad-cloth jackets and pantaloons, not exactly of European cut, but approaching it—a sort of compromise between Paris fashions and the native costume of the country.

Another costume may be noticed, worn by many of the crowd. This is the dress of the native "Pueblos," or *Indios mansos*—the poor labourers of the mines, and the neophytes of the mission. It is a simple dress, and consists of an upper garment the *tilma*, a

sort of coat without sleeves. A coffee-sack with a hole ripped in the bottom for the head to pass through, and a slit cut in each side for the arms, would make the "tilma." It has no waist, and hangs nearly to the hips without other fastening than the support at the shoulders. The tilma is usually a piece of coarse rug—a cheap woollen cloth of the country called "gerga," of a whitish colour, with a few dyed threads to give the semblance of a pattern. This with a pair of dressed sheepskin breeches and rude sandals—*guaraches*—constitutes the wear of most of the "Indios mansos" of Mexico. The head is bare; and the legs, from the knee to the ankle, shine forth in all their copper-coloured nakedness.

Of these dark aborigines—the "peons" of the mission and the mines—there are hundreds stalking about, while their wives and daughters sit squatted upon the ground

in rear of their *petates;* upon which are piled the fruits of the soil—the *tuñas, petahayas,* plums, apricots, grapes, *sandias,* and other species of melons, with roasted nuts of the piñon-tree, the produce of the neighbouring mountains. Others keep stands of *dulces* and *agua-miel* or *limonada;* while others sell small loaves—*piloncillos*—of cornstalk sugar, or baked roots of the agave. Some squat before fires, and prepare *tortillas* and *chile colorado;* or melt the sugared chocolate cake in their urn-like earthen *ollas.* From these humble "hucksters," a hot peppery stew, a dish of *atole,* or a bowl of *piñole,* is to be had for a few *clacos.* There are other stands where you can buy cigarillos of *punche,* or a drink of the fiery *aguardiente* from Taos or El Paso; and these stands are favourite resorts of the thirsty miners and soldiers. There are no "booths," but most of the

hucksters protect themselves from the sun by a huge screen of palmetto mat (*petate*) placed umbrella-like over their heads.

There is one class of persons yet to be spoken of—an important class at the festival of San Juan—they who are to be competitors in the sports—the real wrestlers in the games.

These are young men of all grades in society, and all of them mounted—of course, each in the best way he can. There they go, prancing over the ground, causing their gaily-caparisoned steeds to caper and curvet, especially in front of the tiers of seated señoritas. There are miners among them, and young *haciendados*, and *rancheros*, and *vaqueros*, and *ciboleros*, and young merchants who ride well. Every one rides well in Mexico—even the dwellers in cities are good horsemen.

Nearly a hundred are there of these youths who intend to take part in the various trials of skill in equitation.

Let the sports begin!

## CHAPTER III.

The first exhibition on the programme was to be the *coleo de toros*, which may be rendered in English as "tailing the bull." It is only in the very large cities of Mexico where a regular *plaza de toros*, or arena for the bull-fight, is to be found; but in every village, however insignificant, the sport of bull-tailing may be witnessed, as this only requires an open plain, and as wild a bull as can be procured. The sport is not quite so exciting as the bull-fight, as it is less perilous to those engaged in it. Not unfrequently, however, a gored horse or a mutilated rider is produced by the "coleo;" and fatal

accidents have occurred at times. The horses, too, sometimes stumble, and both horse and rider are trampled by the others crowding from behind, so that in the pell-mell drive awkward accidents are anything but uncommon. The coleo is, therefore, a game of strength, courage, and skill; and to excel in it is an object of high ambition among the youth of a New Mexican settlement.

The arrangements having been completed, it was announced by a herald that the coleo was about to begin. These arrangements were simple enough, and consisted in collecting the crowd to one side, so that the bull, when let loose, would have a clear track before him in the direction of the open country. Should he not be allowed this favour he might head *towards* the crowd,—a thing to be apprehended. In fear of this, most of the women were to be seen mounting into the rude

*carretas,* scores of which were upon the ground, having carried their owners to the spectacle. Of course the señoras and señoritas on the raised benches felt secure.

The competitors were now drawn up in a line. There were a dozen detailed for this first race,—young men of all classes, who were, or fancied themselves, "crack" riders. There were rancheros in their picturesque attire, smart arrieros, miners from the hills, townsmen, haciendados of the valley, vaqueros from the grazing farms, and ciboleros, whose home is for the most part on the wide prairies. Several dragoons, too, were arrayed with the rest, eager to prove their superiority in the *manège* of the horse.

At a given signal the bull was brought forth from a neighbouring *corral.* He was not led by men afoot,—that would have been a dangerous undertaking. His conductors

were well-mounted vaqueros, who, with their lazoes around his horns, were ready, in case of his showing symptoms of mutiny, to fling him to the earth by a jerk.

A vicious-looking brute he appeared, with shaggy frontlet and scowling lurid eye. It was plain that it only needed a little goading to make him a still more terrible object; for he already swept his tail angrily against his flanks, tossed his long straight horns in the air, snorted sharply, and beat the turf at intervals with his hoofs. He was evidently one of the fiercest of a fierce race—the race of Spanish bulls.

Every eye was fixed upon him with interest, and the spectators freely commented upon his qualities. Some thought him too fat, others alleged he was just in the condition to make a good run—as in the coleo, speed, not courage, is the desirable quality.

This difference of opinions led to the laying of numerous wagers on the result,—that is, the time that should elapse from the start until the bull should be "tailed" and "thrown." The throwing of the bull, of course, ends the chase.

When it is considered that the brute selected is one of the strongest, swiftest, and fiercest of his kind, and that no weapon—not even the lazo—is allowed, it will be admitted this is a matter of no easy accomplishment. The animal goes at full run, almost as fast as the horse can gallop; and to bring him to the ground under these circumstances requires the performance of a feat, and one that demands skill, strength, and the best of horsemanship. That feat is to seize the bull's tail, *pass it under one of his hind-legs*, and then jerk him over upon his back!

The bull was led out, some two hundred

yards beyond the line of horsemen, where he was halted, with his head turned to the open plain. The lazoes, that held him by a leash-knot, were then cautiously slipped, two or three fire-squibs, pointed and barbed, were shot into his hips, and away he went amidst the yells of the spectators!

Next moment the riders spurred after, each shouting in his own fashion.

Soon the line was broken, and a confused spread of horsemen, like a "field" of fox-hunters, was seen scouring over the plain. Each moment the troop became elongated, until what had started in line was now strung out in double and single file to a length of several hundred yards. Still on they went, whipping, and spurring, and urging their steeds to the utmost.

The bull, maddened by the arrowy squibs, and terrified by their hissing, ran at the top

of his speed in a nearly direct line. The start he had been allowed was not so easily taken up, even by fast riders, and he had got a full mile or more before any one neared him. Then a dragoon, mounted on a large bay horse, was seen pressing him closely, and at length laying hold of the tail. He was observed to give it a jerk or two, as though endeavouring to fling the brute by sheer strength. It was a failure, however; for the next moment the bull shot out in a side direction, and left his pursuer behind.

A young haciendado, splendidly horsed, was next upon his flanks; but each time he reached forth to grasp the tail it was whisked beyond his reach. He succeeded at length in seizing it; but the bull, making a sudden lurch, whipped his tail from the rider's hands, and left him also in the rear.

One condition of the "coleo" was, that

each competitor, after having once failed, should retire from the ground; so that the haciendado and the dragoon were now actually *hors de chasse*.

These were seen riding back, though not directly in front of the spectators. They preferred making a roundabout thing of it, so that their fallen faces might not be too closely scanned on their return.

On went the bull, and after him the eager and excited horsemen. Another dragoon soon tried his "pluck," and also failed; and then a vaquero, and another horseman, and another, with like success — each failure being hailed by a groan from the crowd. There were several tumbles, too, at which the spectators laughed heartily; and one horse was badly gored, having headed the bull and got entangled upon his horns.

In less than ten minutes, eleven out of

the twelve competitors were seen returning from the chase.

Only one now remained to make his trial. The bull had proved a splendid fellow, and was already in high favour, and loudly applauded by the spectators.

"*Bravo, toro! bravissimo!*" was heard on all sides.

All eyes were now turned upon the enraged animal and his one remaining pursuer. Both were still near enough to be well observed, for the chase had led hitherto, not in one line, but in different directions over the plain; so that the bull was actually no farther from the crowd than when first overtaken by the dragoon. He was at this moment running in a cross course, so that every movement of both pursuer and pursued could be well observed from the stand.

At the first glance it was plain that the bull had now behind him the handsomest horse and horseman upon the field—would they prove the best? That was to be tried.

The horse was a large coal-black *mustang*, with a long full tail, pointed at the tip, and carried like the brush of a running fox. Even while in gallop, his neck slightly curved, and his proud figure, displayed against the smooth sward, called forth expressions of admiration.

The rider was a young man of twenty or over; and his light curling hair and white-red complexion distinguished him from all his competitors—who were, without exception, dark-skinned men. He was dressed in full ranchero costume, with its rich broidery and trappings; and instead of the usual "serapé," he wore a purple *manga*—a more graceful,

as well as costlier garment. The long skirts of this he had flung behind him, in order to have his arms free; and its folds, opening to the breeze, added to the gracefulness of his carriage in the saddle.

The sudden appearance of this splendid horseman—for, hanging in the rear with folded manga, he seemed not to have been noticed before,—caused unusual attention, and many were heard inquiring his name.

"*Carlos the cibolero!*" cried a voice, loud enough to satisfy all at once.

Some evidently knew who "Carlos the cibolero" was, though by far the greater number on the ground did not. Of the former, one was heard inquiring,

"Why hasn't he come up before?—He could have done so, if he had wished."

"*Carrambo!* yes," added another. "He might have done so. He only hung back to

give the others a trial. He knew none of them could throw *that* bull. *Mira!*"

The speaker's conjecture was, no doubt, correct.

It was plain, at first sight, that this rider could easily overtake the bull. His horse was still in a gentle gallop, and, though his ears were set and his red nostrils staring open, it was only through the excitement of the chase, and chafing at being hitherto checked. The bridle rein was, in fact, still tightly drawn.

As the speaker uttered the cautionary phrase "*Mira!*" a change was suddenly observed in the manner of the horseman. He was about twenty paces from the chase, and directly in the rear. All at once his horse sprang forward at double his former speed, and in a few stretches laid himself alongside the bull. The rider was observed to grasp the long outstretched tail, and then

lean forward and downward. The next moment he raised himself with a sudden jerk, and the huge horned creature turned sprawling upon his back. The whole thing seemed to cost him no more effort than if the bull had been a tom-cat. Loud "*vivas!*" broke from the spectators, and the victorious horseman rode back in front of the stand, modestly bowed his thanks, and then retired into the depth of the crowd.

There were not wanting those who fancied that in bowing the eyes of the cibolero were directed on the fair Catalina de Cruces; and some went so far as to assert that she smiled and looked content;—but that could not be. The heiress of the rich Don Ambrosio smile to a compliment from a cibolero!

There was one, however, who *did* smile. That was a fair-haired, fair-skinned girl, who stood upon one of the carretas, by the side of

which the victor had placed himself. Side by side those two faces seemed one. They were of one blood, — one colour, — one race: were they not brother and sister? Yes, — the fair girl was the sister of the cibolero. She was smiling from happiness at the thought of her brother's triumph.

A strange-looking woman was seated in the bottom of the carreta — an old woman, with long flowing hair, white as flax. She was silent, but her sharp eyes were bent upon the cibolero with a triumphant expression. Some regarded her with curiosity, but most with fear, akin to awe. These knew something of her, and whispered strange tales to one another.

"*Esta una bruxa!—una hechicera!*" (She is a witch! a charmer!) said they.

This they muttered in low tones lest they might be heard by Carlos or the girl. *She was their mother!*

## CHAPTER IV.

The sports continue. The bull thrown by the cibolero now cowed, walks moodily about the plain. He would not serve for a second run, so he is lazoed and led off,—to be delivered to the victor as his prize.

A second is brought forth and started, with a fresh dozen of horsemen at his heels.

These seem to be better matched, or rather the bull has not run off so well, as all overtake him at once, riding past him in their headlong speed. Most unexpectedly the animal turns in his tracks, and runs back, heading directly for the stand!

Loud screams are heard from the poblanas

in the carretas—from the señoras and señoritas. No wonder. In ten seconds the enraged brute will be in their midst!

The pursuing horsemen are still far behind him. The sudden turning in their headlong race threw them out of distance. Even the foremost of them cannot come up in time.

The other horsemen are all dismounted. No man on foot will dare to check the onward rush of a goaded bull!

Confusion and loud shouting among the men—terror and screaming among the women, are the characteristics of the scene. Lives will be lost—perhaps many. None know but that they themselves may be the victims!

The strings of carretas filled with their terrified occupants flank the stand on each side; but, running farther out into the plain, form with it a sort of semicircle. The bull

enters this semicircle, and guided by the carretas rushes down, heading directly for the benches, as though determined to break through in that direction. The ladies have risen to their feet, and, half-frantic, seem as though they would leap down upon the very horns of the monster they dread! It is a fearful crisis for them.

Just at this moment a man is seen advancing, lazo in hand, in front of the carretas. He is a-foot. As soon as he has detached himself from the crowd, he spins the lazo round his head, and the noose shooting out is seen to settle over the horns of the bull.

Without losing a moment the man runs to a small tree that stands near the centre of the semicircle, and hastily coils the other end of the lazo around its trunk. Another moment, and he would have been too late.

The knot is scarcely tied, when a heavy

pluck announces that the bull has reached the end of his rope, and the foiled brute is now seen thrown back upon his hips, with the lazo tightly noosed over his horns. He has fallen at the very feet of the spectators!

"*Bravo! viva!*" cried a hundred voices, as soon as their owners had sufficiently recovered from their terror, to call out.

"*Viva! Viva!* Carlos the cibolero!"

It was he who had performed this second feat of skill and daring.

The bull was not yet conquered, however. He was only confined within a certain range —the circle of the lazo—and, rising to his feet, with a furious roar he rushed forward at the crowd. Fortunately the lazo was not long enough to enable him to reach the spectators on either side; and again he tumbled back upon his haunches. There was a scattering on all sides, as it was feared he might still

slip the noose; but the horsemen had now come up. Fresh lazoes were wound about his neck, others tripped up his legs, and he was at length flung violently upon the ground and his quarters well stretched.

He was now completely conquered, and would run no more; and as but two bulls had been provided for the occasion, the "coleo de toros" was for that day at an end.

Several lesser feats of horsemanship were next exhibited, while preparations were being made for another of the grand games of the day. These were by way of interlude, and were of various kinds. One was throwing the lazo upon the foot of a person running at full speed, noosing him around the ankle, and of course tripping him up. This was done by men both mounted and a-foot; and so many accomplished it, that it could hardly be deemed a "feat;" nor was it regarded as

such among the more skilful, who disdained to take part in it.

Picking up the hat was next exhibited. This consisted in the rider throwing his hat upon the ground, and then recovering it from the saddle, while his horse swept past at full gallop. Nearly every rider on the spot was equal to this feat, and only the younger ones looked upon it as a proof of skill. Of these some twenty could now be seen wheeling about at a gallop and ducking down for their sombreros, which they had previously dropped.

But it is not so easy to pick up smaller objects, and a piece of coin lying flat upon the ground tries the skill of the best "cavallero."

The Commandante Vizcarra now stepped forth and commanded silence. Placing a Spanish dollar upon the smooth turf, he called out,

"This to the man who can take it up

at the first trial. Five gold onzas that Sergeant Gomez will perform the feat!"

There was silence for a while. Five gold "onzas" (doubloons) was a large sum of money. Only a "rico" could afford to lose such a sum.

After a pause, however, there came a reply. A young ranchero stepped forth:—

"Colonel Vizcarra," said he, "I will not bet that Sergeant Gomez cannot perform the feat; but I'll wager there's another on the ground can do it as well as he. Double the amount if you please."

"Name your man!" said Vizcarra.

"Carlos the cibolero."

"Enough—I accept your wager. Any one else may have their trial," continued Vizcarra, addressing the crowd. "I shall replace the dollar whenever it is taken up—only one attempt, remember!"

Several made the attempt and failed. Some touched the coin, and even drew it from its position, but no one succeeded in lifting it.

At length a dragoon mounted on a large bay appeared in the list, who was recognised as the Sergeant Gomez. He was the same that had first come up with the bull, but failed to fling him; and no doubt that failure dwelling still in his thoughts added to the natural gloom of his very sallow face. He was a man of large size, unquestionably a good rider, but he lacked that symmetrical shape that gives promise of sinewy activity.

The feat required little preparation. The sergeant looked to his saddle-girths, disencumbered himself of his sabre and belts, and then set his steed in motion.

In a few minutes he directed his horse so as to shave past the shining coin, and then,

bending down, he tried to seize it. He succeeded in lifting it up from the ground; but, owing to the slight hold he had taken, it dropped from his fingers before he had got it to the height of the stirrup.

A shout, half of applause and half of disapprobation, came from the crowd. Most were disposed to favour him on Vizcarra's account. Not that they loved Colonel Vizcarra, but they *feared* him, and that made them loyal.

The cibolero now rode forth upon his shining black. All eyes were turned upon him. His handsome face would have won admiration, but for its very *fairness*. Therein lay a secret prejudice. They knew *he was not of their race!*

Woman's heart has no prejudice, however; and along that line of dark-eyed "doncellas"

more than one pair of eyes were sparkling with admiration for the blonde "Americano," for of such race was Carlos the cibolero.

Other eyes than woman's looked favourably on the cibolero, and other lips murmured applause. Among the half-brutalized Tagnos, with bent limbs and downcast look, there were men who dreamt of days gone by; who knew that their fathers were once free; who in their secret assemblies in mountain cave, or in the deep darkness of the "estufa," still burned the "sacred fire" of the god Quetzalcoatl—still talked of Moctezuma and Freedom.

These, though darker than all others, had no prejudice against the fair skin of Carlos. Even over their benighted minds the future had cast some rays of its light. A sort of mysterious presentiment, apparently instinctive, existed among them, that their deli-

verers from the yoke of Spanish tyranny would yet come from the East—from beyond the great plains!

The cibolero scarce deigned to make any preparation. He did not even divest himself of his manga, but only threw it carelessly back, and left its long skirt trailing over the hips of his horse.

Obedient to the voice of his rider, the animal sprang into a gallop; and then, guided by the touch of the knees, he commenced circling round the plain, increasing his speed as he went.

Having gained a wide reach, the rider directed his horse towards the glittering coin. When nearly over it, he bent down from the saddle, caught the piece in his fingers, flung it up into the air, and then, suddenly checking his horse underneath, permitted it to drop into his outstretched palm!

All this was done with the ease and hability of a Hindoo juggler. Even the prejudiced could not restrain their applause; and loud *vivas* for "Carlos the cibolero" again pealed upon the air.

The sergeant was humiliated. He had for a long time been victor in these sports—for Carlos had not been present until this day, or had never before taken part in them. Vizcarra was little better pleased. His favourite humbled—himself the loser of ten golden onzas—no small sum, even to the Commandante of a frontier Presidio. Moreover, to be jibed by the fair señoritas for losing a wager he had himself challenged, and which, no doubt, he felt certain of winning. From that moment Vizcarra liked not "Carlos the cibolero."

The next exhibition consisted in riding at full gallop to the edge of a deep "ze-

quia," which passed near the spot. The object of this was to show the courage and activity of the rider, as well as the high training of the steed.

The zequia—a canal used for irrigation—was of such width, that a horse could not well leap over it, and deep enough to render it no very pleasant matter for a horseman to get into. It, therefore, required both skill and daring to accomplish the feat. The animal was to arrive upon the bank of the canal in full run, and to be drawn up suddenly, so that his four feet should rest upon the ground inside a certain line. This line was marked at less than two lengths of himself from the edge of the drain. Of course the bank was quite firm, else the accomplishment of such a feat would have been impossible.

Many succeeded in doing it to perfec-

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tion ; and an admirable piece of horsemanship it was. The horse, suddenly checked in his impetuous gallop, upon the very brink of the zequia, and drawn back on his haunches, with head erect, starting eyeballs, and open smoking nostrils, formed a noble picture to look upon. Several, however, by way of contrast, gave the crowd a ludicrous picture to laugh at. These were either faint-hearted riders, who stopped short before arriving near the bank, or bold but unskilful ones, who overshot the mark, and went plunge into the deep muddy water. Either class of failure was hailed by groans and laughter, which the appearance of the half-drowned and dripping cavaliers, as they sweltered out on the bank, rendered almost continuous. On the other hand, a well-executed manœuvre elicited *vivas* of applause.

No wonder that, under such a system of training and emulation, these people are the finest riders in the world, and such they certainly are.

It was observed that Carlos the cibolero took no part in this game. What could be the reason? His friends alleged that he looked upon it as unworthy of him. He had already exhibited a skill in horsemanship of a superior kind, and to take part in this would be seeking a superfluous triumph. Such was, in fact, the feeling of Carlos.

But the chagrined Commandante had other views. Captain Roblado as well—for the latter had seen, or fancied he had seen, a strange expression in the eyes of Catalina at each fresh triumph of the cibolero. The two "militarios" had designs of their own. Base ones they were, and intended for the humiliation of

Carlos. Approaching him, they inquired why he had not attempted the last feat.

"I did not think it worth while," answered the cibolero, in a modest tone.

"Ho!" cried Roblado, tauntingly, "my good fellow, you must have other reasons than that. It is not so contemptible a feat to rein up on the edge of that 'zanca.' You fear a ducking, I fancy?"

This was uttered in a tone of banter, loud enough for all to hear; and Captain Roblado wound up his speech with a jeering laugh.

Now, it was just this ducking that the militarios wished to see. They had conceived hopes, that if Carlos attempted the feat, some accident, such as the slipping or stumbling of his horse, might lead to that result; which to them would have been as grateful as it would have been mortifying to the cibolero.

A man floundering out of a muddy ditch, and drenched to the skin, however daring the attempt that led to it, would cut but a sorry figure in the eyes of a holiday crowd; and in such a situation did they wish to see Carlos placed.

Whether the cibolero suspected their object did not appear. His reply does not show. When it was heard, the "zequia" and its muddy water were at once forgotten. A feat of greater interest occupied the attention of the spectators.

## CHAPTER V.

Carlos, seated in his saddle, was silent for a while. He seemed puzzled for a reply. The manner of the two officers, as well as Roblado's speech, stung him. To have proceeded to the performance of this very common feat after all others had given over, merely on the banter of Roblado and the Commandante, would have been vexatious enough; and yet to refuse it would lay him open to jeers and insinuations; and, perhaps, this was their design.

He had reason to suspect some sinister motive. He knew something of both the men—of their public character—he could not other-

wise, as they were lords paramount of the place. But of their private character, too, he had some knowledge, and that was far from being to their credit. With regard to Roblado, the cibolero had particular reasons for disliking *him* — very particular reasons; and but that the former was still ignorant of a certain fact, he had quite as good a reason for reciprocating the dislike. Up to this moment Roblado knew nothing of the cibolero, who, for the most part of his time, was absent from the valley. Perhaps the officer had never encountered him before, or at all events had never changed words with him. Carlos knew *him* better; and long ere this encounter, for reasons already hinted at, had regarded him with dislike.

This feeling was not lessened by the conduct of the officer on the present occasion. On the contrary, the haughty jeering

tones fell bitterly upon the ear of the cibolero. He replied, at length: — "Captain Roblado, I have said it is not worth my while to perform what a *muchachito* of ten years old would hardly deem a feat. I would not wrench my horse's mouth for such a pitiful exhibition as running him up on the edge of that harmless gutter; but if ——"

"Well, if what?" eagerly inquired Roblado, taking advantage of the pause, and half suspecting Carlos' design.

"If you feel disposed to risk a doubloon —I am but a poor hunter, and cannot place more—I shall attempt what a muchachito of ten years *would* consider a feat perhaps."

"And what may that be, Señor Cibolero?" asked the officer, sneeringly.

"I will check my horse at full gallop *on the brow of yonder cliff!*"

"Within two lengths from the brow?"

"Within two lengths—less—the same distance that is traced here on the banks of the zequia!"

The surprise created by this announcement held the bystanders for some moments in silence. It was a proposal of such wild and reckless daring that it was difficult to believe that the maker of it was in earnest. Even the two officers were for a moment staggered by it, and inclined to fancy the cibolero was not serious, but mocking them.

The cliff to which Carlos had pointed was part of the bluff that hemmed in the valley. It was a sort of promontory, however, that jutted out from the general line, so as to be a conspicuous object from the plain below. Its brow was of equal height with the rest of the precipice, of which it was a part—a sort of buttress—and the grassy turf that appeared along its edge was but the continuation of the

upper plateau. Its front to the valley was vertical, without terrace or ledge, although horizontal seams traversing its face showed a stratification of lime and sandstone alternating with each other. From the sward upon the valley to the brow above the height was one thousand feet sheer. To gaze up to it was a trial to delicate nerves—to look down put the stoutest to the proof.

Such was the cliff upon whose edge the cibolero proposed to rein up his steed. No wonder the proposal was received with a surprise that caused a momentary silence in the crowd. When that passed, voices were heard exclaiming,—"Impossible!" "He is mad!" "Pah! he's joking!" "*Esta burlando los militarios!*" (He's mocking the military gents), and suchlike expressions.

Carlos sat playing with his bridle-rein, and waiting for a reply.

He had not long to wait. Vizcarra and Roblado muttered some hasty words between themselves; and then, with an eagerness of manner, Roblado cried out,—

"I accept the wager!"

"And I another onza!" added the Commandante.

"Señores," said Carlos, with an air of apparent regret, "I am sorry I cannot take both. This doubloon is all I have in the world; and it's not likely I could borrow another just now."

As he said this, Carlos regarded the crowd with a smile, but many of these were in no humour for smiling. They were really awed by the terrible fate which they believed awaited the reckless cibolero. A voice, however, answered him:—

"Twenty onzas, Carlos, for any other pur-

pose. But I cannot encourage this mad project."

It was the young ranchero, his former backer, who spoke.

"Thank you, Don Juan," replied the cibolero. "I know you would lend them. Thank you all the same. Do not fear! I'll win the onza. Ha! ha! ha! I haven't been twenty years in the saddle to be bantered by a *Gachupino*."

"Sir!" thundered Vizcarra and Roblado in a breath, at the same time grasping the hilts of their swords, and frowning in a fierce threatening manner.

"Oh! gentlemen, don't be offended," said Carlos, half sneeringly. "It only slipped from my tongue. I meant no insult, I assure you."

"Then keep your tongue behind your

teeth, my good fellow," threatened Vizcarra. "Another slip of the kind may cost you a fall."

"Thank you, Señor Commandante," replied Carlos, still laughing. "Perhaps I'll take your advice."

The only rejoinder uttered by the Commandante was a fierce "Carrajo!" which Carlos did not notice; for at this moment his sister, having heard of his intention, sprang down from the carreta and came running forward, evidently in great distress.

"Oh, brother Carlos!" she cried, reaching out her arms, and grasping him by the knees, "Is it true? Surely it is not true?"

"What, *hermanita?*" (little sister), he asked, with a smile.

"That you ——"

She could utter no more, but turned her eyes, and pointed to the cliff.

"Certainly, Rosita, and why not? For shame, girl! Don't be alarmed — there's nought to fear, I assure you — I've done the like before."

"Dear, dear Carlos, I know you are a brave horseman — none braver — but, oh! think of the danger—*Dios de mi alma!* think of ——"

"Pshaw! sister! Don't shame me before the people—come to mother!—hear what she will say! I warrant she won't regard it;" and, so saying, the cibolero rode up to the carreta followed by his sister.

Poor Rosita! Eyes gleamed upon you at that moment that saw you for the first time — eyes, in whose dark orbs lay an expression that boded you no good. Your fair form, the angelic beauty of your face — perhaps your very grief — awakened interest in a heart whose love never meant else than ruin

to its object. It was the heart of Colonel Vizcarra.

"*Mira!* Roblado!" muttered he to his subordinate and fellow-villain. "See yonder! *Santissima Virgen!* Saint Guadalupe! Look, man! Venus, as I'm a Christian and a soldier! In the name of all the saints, what sky has she fallen from?"

"*Por Dios!* I never saw her before," replied the captain; "she must be the sister of this fellow: yes—hear them! they address each other as brother and sister! She *is* pretty!"

"*Ay, de mi!*" sighed the Commandante. "What a godsend! I was growing dull—very dull of this monotonous frontier life. With this new excitement, perhaps, I may kill another month. Will she last me that long, think you?"

"Scarcely—if she come and go as easily as the rest. What! already tired of Iñez?"

"Poh! poh! loved me too much; and that I can't bear. I would rather too little if anything."

"Perhaps this blonde may please you better in that respect. But, see! they are off!"

As Roblado spoke, Carlos and his sister had moved forward to the carreta, which held their aged mother, and were soon in conversation with her.

The Commandante and his captain, as well as a large number of the spectators, followed, and crowded around to listen.

"She wants to persuade me against it, mother," Carlos was heard to say. He had already communicated his design. "Without *your* consent, I will not. But hear me, dear mother; I have half pledged myself, and

I wish to make good my pledge. It is a *point of honour*, mother."

The last phrase was spoken loudly and emphatically in the ear of the old woman, who appeared to be a little deaf.

"Who wants to dissuade you?" she asked, raising her head, and glancing upon the circle of faces. "Who?"

"Rosita, mother."

"Let Rosita to her loom, and weave rebosos—that's what she's fit for. You, my son, can do greater things—deeds, aye, deeds; else, have you not in your veins the blood of your father. *He* did deeds—*he*—ha! ha! ha!"

The strange laugh caused the spectators to start, accompanied, as it was, with the wild look of her who uttered it.

"Go!" cried she, tossing back her long flax-coloured locks, and waving her arms in

the air—" go, Carlos the cibolero, and show the tawny cowards—slaves that they are—what a free American can do. To the cliff! to the cliff!"

As she uttered the awful command, she sank back into the carreta, and relapsed into her former silence.

Carlos interrogated her no further. The expressions she had let slip had rendered him somewhat eager to close the conversation; for he noticed that they were not lost on several of the bystanders. The officers, as well as the priests and alcalde, exchanged significant glances while she was uttering them.

Placing his sister once more in the carreta, and giving her a parting embrace, Carlos leaped to the back of his steed, and rode forth upon the plain. When at some distance he reined in, and bent his eyes for a moment upon the tiers of benches where sat the señoras and

señoritas of the town. A commotion could be observed among them. They had heard of the intended feat, and many would have dissuaded the cibolero from the perilous attempt.

There was one whose heart was full to bursting—full as that of Carlos' own sister; and yet she dared not show it to those around. She was constrained to sit in silent agony, and suffer.

Carlos knew this. He drew a white handkerchief from his bosom, and waved it in the air, as though bidding some one an adieu. Whether he was answered could not be told; but the next moment he wheeled his horse, and galloped off towards the cliffs.

There were conjectures among the señoras and señoritas, among the poblanas too, as to who was the recipient of that parting salute. Many guesses were made, many names men-

tioned, and scandal ran the rounds. One only of all knew in her heart for whom the compliment was meant—in her heart overflowing with love and fear.

## CHAPTER VI.

All who had horses followed the cibolero, who now directed himself towards a path that led from the valley to the table above. This path wound up the cliffs by zig-zag turnings, and was the only one by which the upper plain could be reached at that point. A corresponding road traversed the opposite bluff, so that the valley might be here crossed; and this was the only practicable crossing for several miles up and down.

Though but a thousand feet separated the valley and table-land, the path leading from one to the other was nearly a mile in length; and as it was several miles from the scene of

the festival to the bottom of the cliff, only those accompanied Carlos who were mounted, with a few others determined to witness every manœuvre of this fearful attempt. Of course, the officers were of the party who went up. The rest of the people remained in the valley, but moved forward in the direction of the cliffs, so that they would be able to observe the more interesting and thrilling part of the spectacle.

For more than an hour those on the plain were kept waiting; but they did not allow the time to pass unimproved. A *monté* table had been spread out, over which both gold and silver changed hands rapidly, the two padrés of the mission being among the highest bettors; and the señoras, among themselves, had a quiet little game of their favourite *chuza*. A "main" between a pair of sturdy chanticleers, one belonging to the alcalde and

the other to the *cura* (!), furnished the interlude for another half-hour. In this contest the representative of the Church was triumphant. His grey cock ("pardo") killed the alcalde's red one at a single blow, by striking one of his long steel galves through the latter's head. This was regarded as a very interesting and pleasant spectacle by all on the ground—ladies included, and alcalde excepted.

By the time the cock-fight was finished, the attention of the crowd became directed to the movements of the party who had gone up to the upper plain. These were now seen along the edge of the cliff, and by their manœuvres it was evident they were engaged in arranging the preliminaries of the perilous adventure. Let us join them.

The cibolero, on gaining the ground, pointed out the spot where he had proposed to execute his daring design. From the plain above

the cliffs were not visible, and even the great abyss of the valley itself could not be seen a hundred paces back from the edge of the bluff. There was no escarpment or slope of any kind. The turf ran in to the very edge of the precipice, and on the same level with the rest of the plain. It was smooth and firm—covered with a short sward of *gramma* grass. There was neither break nor pebble to endanger the hoof. No accident could arise from that cause.

The spot chosen, as already stated, was a sort of buttress-like promontory that stood out from the line of bluffs. This formation was more conspicuous from below. Viewing it from above, it resembled a tongue-like continuation of the plain.

Carlos first rode out to its extremity, and carefully examined the turf. It was just of the proper firmness to preclude the possibility

of a horse's hoof either sliding or sinking into it. He was accompanied by Vizcarra, Roblado, and others. Many approached the spot, but kept at a safe distance from the edge of the horrid steep. Though denizens of this land of grand geological features, there were many present who dreaded to stand upon the brow of that fearful ledge and look below.

The cibolero sat upon his horse, on its very edge, as calm as if he had been on the banks of the zequia, and directed the marking of the line. His horse showed no symptoms of nervousness. It was evident he was well trained to such situations. Now and then he stretched out his neck, gazed down into the valley, and, recognising some of his kind below, uttered a shrill neigh. Carlos purposely kept him on the cliff, in order to accustom him to it before making the terrible trial.

The line was soon traced, less than two

lengths of the horse from the last grass on the turf. Vizcarra and Roblado would have insisted upon short measure; but their proposal to curtail it was received with murmurs of disapprobation and mutterings of "Shame!"

What did these men want? Though not evident to the crowd, they certainly desired the death of the cibolero. Both had their reasons. Both hated the man. The cause or causes of their hatred were of late growth,—with Roblado still later than his Commandante. He had observed something within the hour that had rendered him furious. He had observed the waving of that white kerchief; and as he stood by the stand he had seen to whom the "adios" was addressed. It had filled him with astonishment and indignation; and his language to Carlos had assumed a bullying and brutal tone.

Horrible as such a supposition may seem, both he and Vizcarra would have rejoiced to see the cibolero tumble over the bluff. Horrible indeed, it seems; but such were the men, and the place, and the times, that there is nothing improbable in it. On the contrary, cases of equal barbarity—wishes and *acts* still more inhuman—are by no means rare under the skies of "Nuevo Mexico."

The young ranchero, who had accompanied the party to the upper plain, insisted upon fair play. Though but a ranchero, he was classed among the "ricos," and being a fellow of spirit, urged Carlos' rights, even in the face of the moustached and scowling militarios.

"Here, Carlos!" cried he, while the arrangements were progressing; "I see you are bent on this madness; and since I cannot turn you from it, I shall not embarrass you.

But you sha'n't risk yourself for such a trifle. My purse! bet what sum you will."

As he said this, he held out a purse to the cibolero, which, from its bulk, evidently contained a large amount.

Carlos regarded the purse for a moment without making answer. He was evidently gratified by the noble offer. His countenance showed that he was deeply touched by the kindness of the youth. "No," said he, at length; "no, Don Juan. I thank you with all my heart, but I cannot take your purse—one onza, nothing more. I should like to stake one against the Commandante."

"As many as you please," urged the ranchero.

"Thank you, Don Juan! only one—that with my own will be two.—Two onzas!—that, in faith, is the largest bet I have ever made. *Vaya!* a poor cibolero staking a double onza!"

"Well, then," replied Don Juan, "if you don't, I shall. Colonel Vizcarra!" said he aloud, addressing himself to the Commandante, "I suppose you would like to win back your wager. Carlos will now take your bet for the onza, and I challenge you to place ten."

"Agreed!" said the Commandante, stiffly.

"Dare you double it?" inquired the ranchero.

"Dare I, sir?" echoed the Colonel, indignant at being thus challenged in the presence of the spectators. "Quadruple it, if you wish, sir."

"Quadruple then!" retorted the other. "Forty onzas that Carlos performs the feat!"

"Enough! deposit your stakes!"

The golden coins were counted out, and held by one of the bystanders, and judges were appointed.

The arrangements having been completed, the spectators drew back upon the plain, and left the cibolero in full possession of the promontory—alone with his horse.

## CHAPTER VII.

All stood watching him with interested eyes. Every movement was noted.

He first alighted from the saddle, stripped off his manga, had it carried back and placed out of the way. He next looked to his spurs, to see that the straps were properly buckled. After this he re-tied his sash, and placed the sombrero firmly on his head. He buttoned his velveteen calzoneros down nearly to his ankles, so that their leathern bottoms might not flap open and discommode him. His hunting-knife along with his "whip" were sent back to the charge of Don Juan.

His attention was next turned to his horse, that stood all this while, curving his neck proudly as though he divined that he was to be called upon for some signal service. The bridle was first scrutinised. The great bit—a Mameluke—was carefully examined, lest there might be some flaw or crack in the steel. The head-strap was buckled to its proper tightness, and then the reins were minutely scanned. These were of the hair of wild horse's tails closely and neatly plaited. Leather might snap, there was no fear of breaking such cords as these.

The saddle now had its turn. Passing from side to side Carlos tried both stirrup-leathers, and examined the great wooden blocks which formed the stirrups. The girth was the last as well as most important object of his solicitude. He loosed the buckles on both sides, and then tightened them, using

his knees to effect his purpose. When drawn to his liking, the tip of the finger could not have been passed under the strong leathern band.

No wonder he observed all this caution. The snapping of a strap, or the slipping of a buckle, might have hurled him into eternity.

Having satisfied himself that all was right, he gathered up the reins, and leaped lightly into the saddle.

He first directed his horse at a walk along the cliff, and within a few feet of its edge. This was to strengthen the nerves both of himself and the animal. Presently the walk became a trot, and then a gentle canter. Even this was an exhibition fearful to behold. To those regarding it from below it was a beautiful but terrible spectacle.

After a while he headed back towards the plain, and then stretching into a fair

gallop—the gait in which he intended to approach the cliff—he suddenly reined up again, so as to throw his horse nearly on his flanks. Again he resumed the same gallop and again reined up; and this manœuvre he repeated at least a dozen times, now with his horse's head turned towards the cliffs, and now in the direction of the plain. Of course this gallop was far from being the full speed of the animal. That was not bargained for. To draw a horse up at race-course speed within two lengths of himself would be an utter impossibility, even by sacrificing the life of the animal. A shot passing through his heart would not check a racer in so short a space. A fair gallop was all that could be expected under the circumstances, and the judges expressed themselves satisfied with that which was exhibited before them. Carlos had put the question.

At length he was seen to turn his horse toward the cliff, and take his firmest seat in the saddle. The determined glance of his eyes showed that the moment had come for the final trial.

A slight touch of the spur set the noble brute in motion, and in another second he was in full gallop, and heading directly for the cliff!

The gaze of all was fixed with intense earnestness upon that reckless horseman. Every heart heaved with emotion; and, beyond their quick breathing, not an utterance escaped from the spectators. The only sounds heard were the hoof-strokes of the horse as they rang back from the hard turf of the plain.

The suspense was of short duration. Twenty strides brought horse and horseman close to the verge, within half-a-dozen lengths. The rein still hung loose—Carlos dared not

tighten it—a touch he knew would bring his horse to a halt, and that before he had crossed the line would only be a failure.

Another leap,—another,—yet another! Ho! he is inside—Great God! He will be over!

Such exclamations rose from the spectators as they saw the horseman cross the line, still in a gallop; but the next moment a loud cheer broke from both crowds, and the "vivas" of those in the valley were answered by similar shouts from those who witnessed the feat from above.

Just as the horse appeared about to spring over the horrid brink, the reins were observed suddenly to tighten, the fore-hoofs became fixed and spread, and the hips of the noble animal rested upon the plain. He was poised at scarce three feet distance from the edge of the cliff! While in this attitude the horse-

man raised his right hand, lifted his sombrero, and after waving it round returned it to his head!

A splendid picture from below. The dark forms of both horse and rider were perceived as they drew up on the cliff, and the imposing and graceful attitude was fully developed against the blue back-ground of the sky. The arms, the limbs, the oval outlines of the steed, even the very trappings, could be seen distinctly; and for the short period in which they were poised and motionless, the spectator might have fancied an equestrian statue of bronze, its pedestal the pinnacle of the cliff!

This period was but of a moment's duration, but, during its continuance, the loud "vivas" pealed upon the air. Those looking from below saw the horseman suddenly wheel, and disappear beyond the brow-line of the bluff.

The daring feat was ended and over; and hearts, but a moment ago throbbing wildly within tender bosoms, now returned to their soft and regular beating.

## CHAPTER VIII.

When the cibolero returned to the plain, he was received with a fresh burst of vivas, and kerchiefs were waved to greet him. One only caught his eye,—but that was enough. He saw not the rest, nor cared to see them. That little perfumed piece of cambric, with its lace border, was to him an ensign of hope — a banner that would have beckoned him on to achieve deeds of still higher daring. He saw it held aloft by a small jewelled hand, and waved in triumph for *him*. He was happy.

He passed the stand, rode up to the carreta, and, dismounting, kissed his mother and sister. He was followed by Don Juan, his

backer; — and there were those who noticed that the eyes of the blonde were not always upon her brother: there was another on the ground who shared their kind glances, and that other was the young ranchero. No one, not even the dullest, could fail to notice that these kind glances were more than repaid. It was an affair of mutual and understood love, beyond a doubt.

Though Don Juan was a rich young farmer, and by courtesy a "Don," yet in rank he was but a degree above the cibolero — the degree which wealth confers. He was not one of the high aristocracy of the place, — about that he cared little; but he had the character of being a brave, spirited young fellow; and in time, if he desired it, might mingle with the "sangre azul." It was not likely he ever should — at least through the influence of marriage. Any one who was wit-

ness to the ardent glances exchanged between his eyes and those of the cibolero's sister, would prophesy with ease that Don Juan was not going to marry among the aristocracy.

It was a happy little group around the carreta, and there was feasting, too, — dulces, and orgeat, and wine from El Paso, of the best vintage. Don Juan was not afraid to spend money, and he had no reason on that occasion, with fifty onzas of clear gain in his pocket—a fact that by no means sat easily on the mind of the Commandante.

The latter was observed, with a clouded countenance, strolling around, occasionally approaching the carreta, and glancing somewhat rudely towards the group. His glances were, in fact, directed on Rosita, and the consciousness of his almost despotic power rendered him careless of concealing his designs. His admiration was expressed in such a manner that many could perceive it. The

poor girl's eyes fell timidly when they encountered his, and Don Juan having noticed it, was not without feelings of anger as well as uneasiness. He knew the character of the Commandante, as well as the dangerous power with which he was armed. O Liberty! what a glorious thing art thou! How many hopes are blighted, how many loves crossed, and hearts crushed, in a land where thou art not! where the myrmidons of tyranny have power to thwart the purpose of a life, or arrest the natural flow of its affections!

Several games were yet carried on upon the plain, but they were without general interest. The splendid feat of the cibolero had eclipsed all lesser exhibitions for the time; besides, a number of the head men were out of humour. Vizcarra was sad, and Roblado savage —jealous of Catalina. The Alcalde and his assistant were in a vexed state, as both had bet heavy sums on the red cock. Both the

padrés had lost at *monté*, and they were no longer in a Christian spirit. The cura alone was in good spirits, and ready to back the "pardo" for another main.

The concluding game was at length heralded. It was to be the "*Correr el gallo*" (running the cock). As this is rather an exciting sport, the *monté* tables and other minor amusements were once more put aside; and all prepared to watch "el gallo."

"Running the cock" is a New Mexican game in all its characteristics. It is easily described. Thus: A cock is suspended by the limbs to a horizontal branch, at just such a height that a mounted man may lay hold of his head and neck hanging downward. The bird is fastened in such a manner that a smart pluck will detach him from the tree; while to render this the more difficult, both head and neck are well covered with soap. The horseman

must be in full gallop while passing under the branch; and he who succeeds in plucking down the cock is pursued by all the others, who endeavour to rob him of the prize. He has a fixed point to run round, and his goal is the tree from which he started. Sometimes he is overtaken before reaching this, the cock snatched from him,—or, as not unfrequently happens, torn to pieces in the contest. Should he succeed in getting back—still retaining the bird entire—he is then declared victor. The scene ends by his laying his prize at the feet of his mistress; and she—usually some pretty poblana—appears that same evening at the fandango with the feathered trophy under her arm—thus signifying her appreciation of the compliment paid her, as well as giving to the *fandangüeros* ocular proof of the fact, that some skilful horseman is her admirer. It is a cruel sport, for it must be remembered that

the poor cock who undergoes all this plucking and mangling is a *living bird!* It is doubtful whether a thought of the *cruelty* ever entered the mind of a New Mexican. If so, it must have been a New Mexican *woman;* for the humanity of these is in an inverse ratio to that of their lords. For the women it may be urged that the sport is a custom of the country; and what country is without its cruel sports? Is it rational or consistent to weep over the sufferings of Chanticleer, while we ride gaily upon the heels of poor broken Reynard?

There are two modes of the "Correr el gallo." The first has been described. The second only differs from it in the fact, that the cock, instead of being tied to a tree, is buried up to his shoulders in the earth. The horsemen, as before, pass in routine—each bending from his saddle, and striving to pluck the bird

out of the ground. For the rest, the conditions are the same as before.

The first cock was hung to a branch; and the competitors having taken their places in a line, the game commenced.

Several made the attempt, and actually seized the bird's head, but the soap foiled them.

The dragoon sergeant was once more a competitor; but whether his colonel made any further bet upon him is not known. The Commandante had gambled enough for that day; and but for a little peculation which he enjoyed upon the mining "derechos," and other little customs dues, he would have felt his losses still more severely. Out of the derechos, however, he knew he could square himself at the expense of the vice-regal government.

The sergeant, who, as already stated, had the advantage of a tall figure and a tall horse,

was able to get a full grasp at the neck of the bird; and being already provided, as was afterwards ascertained, with a fistful of sand, he took the prize with him, and galloped off.

But there were swifter horses than his on the ground; and before he could double the turning-post, he was overtaken by an active vaquero, and lost a wing of his bird. Another wing was plucked from him by a second pursuer; and he returned to the tree with nothing but a fragment left! Of course he received neither *vivas* nor cheers.

Carlos the cibolero took no part in this contest. He knew that he had won glory enough for that day—that he had made both friends and enemies, and he did not desire to swell the list of either. Some of the bystanders, however, began to banter him, wishing, no doubt, to see him again exhibit his fine

horsemanship. He withstood this for some time, until two more cocks were plucked from the tree—the vaquero already alluded to carrying one of them clear, and laying it at the feet of his smiling sweetheart.

A new thought seemed now to have entered the mind of Carlos, and he was seen riding into the lists, evidently about to take part in the next race.

"It will be some time before I can be present at another fiesta," remarked he to Don Juan. "Day-after to-morrow I start for the plains. So I'll take all the sport I can out of this one."

An innovation was now introduced in the game. The bird was buried in the ground; and its long neck and sharp-pointed bill showed that it was no cock, but a snow-white "gruya," one of the beautiful species of herons common in these regions. Its fine tapering

neck was not soiled with soap, but left in its natural state. In this case the chances of failure lay in the fact that, loosely buried as it was, the gruya would not allow its head to be approached by a hand, but jerked it from side to side, thus rendering it no easy matter to get hold of it.

The signal being given, away went the string of horsemen! Carlos was among the last, but on coming up he saw the white bending neck still there. His hand was too quick for the bird, and the next moment it was dragged from the yielding sand, and flapping its snowy wings over the withers of his horse.

It required not only speed on the part of Carlos, but great adroitness, to pass the crowd of horsemen, who now rushed from all points to intercept him. Here he dashed forward — there reined up — anon wheeled

round a rider, and passed behind him; and, after a dozen such manœuvres, the black horse was seen shooting off towards the turning-post alone. This passed, he galloped back to the goal, and holding up his prize, unstained and intact, received the applause of the spectators.

There was a good deal of guessing and wondering as to who would be the recipient of the trophy. Some girl of his own rank, conjectured the crowd; some poblana or ranchero's daughter. The cibolero did not seem in haste to gratify their curiosity; but, after a few minutes, he astonished them all, by flinging the gruya into the air, and suffering it to fly off. The bird rose majestically upward, and then, drawing in its long neck, was seen winging its way toward the lower end of the valley.

It was observed, that before parting with

the bird Carlos had plucked from its shoulders the long gossamer-like feathers that distinguish the heron species. These he was tying into a plume.

Having accomplished this, he put spurs to his horse, and, galloping up to the front of the stand, he bent gracefully forward, and deposited the trophy at the feet of *Catalina de Cruces!*

A murmur of surprise ran through the crowd, and sharp censure followed fast. What! a cibolero,—a poor devil, of whom nothing was known, aspire to the smiles of a rico's daughter? It was not a compliment. It was an insult! Presumption intolerable!

And these critiques were not confined to the señoras and señoritas. The poblanas and rancheras were as bitter as they. These felt themselves slighted — passed by — regularly

jilted—by one of their own class. Catalina de Cruces, indeed!

Catalina—her situation was pleasant, yet painful—painful, because embarrassing. She smiled, then blushed, uttered a soft "*Gracias, cavallero!*" yet hesitated a moment whether to take up the trophy. A scowling father had started to his feet on one side, on the other a scowling lover. The last was Roblado.

"Insolent!" cried he, seizing the plume and flinging it to the earth; "insolent!"

Carlos bent down from his saddle, once more laid hold of the plume, and stuck it under the gold band of his hat. Then, turning a defiant glance upon the officer, he said, "Don't lose your temper, Captain Roblado. A jealous lover makes but an indifferent husband;" and transferring his look to Cata-

lina, he added with a smile, and in a changed tone, "Gracias, señorita!"

As he said this he doffed his sombrero, and waving it gracefully, turned his horse and rode off.

Roblado half drew his sword, and his loud "Carrajo!" along with the muttered imprecations of Don Ambrosio, reached the ears of the cibolero. But the captain was far from brave, with all his swagger; and seeing the long *macheté* of the horseman strapped over his hips, he vented his spite in threats only, and suffered Carlos to depart.

The incident had created no small excitement, and a good deal of angry feeling. The cibolero had roused the indignation of the aristocracy, and the jealousy and envy of the democracy; so that, after all his brilliant performances, he was likely to leave the field any-

thing but a favourite. The wild words of his strange old mother had been widely reported, and national hatred was aroused, so that his skill called forth envy instead of admiration. An angel, indeed, should he have been to have won friendship there—he an Americano—a "heretico"—for in this far corner of the earth, fanaticism was as fierce as in the Seven-hilled City itself during the gloomiest days of the Inquisition!

Mayhap it was as well for Carlos that the sports were now ended, and the fiesta about to close.

In a few minutes the company began to move off. The mules, oxen, and asses, were yoked to the carretas—the rancheros and rancheras climbed inside the deep boxes; and then, what with the cracking of quirts, the shouts of drivers, and the hideous screaming of the ungreased axles, a concert of sounds

arose, that would have astonished any human being, except a born native of the soil.

In half-an-hour the ground was clear, and the lean coyote might be seen skulking over the spot in search of a morsel for his hungry maw.

## CHAPTER IX.

Though the field-sports were over, the fiesta of San Juan was not yet ended. There were still many sights to be seen before the crowd scattered to their homes. There was to be another turn at the church—another sale of "indultos," beads, and relics,—another sprinkling of sacred water, in order that the coffers of the padrés might be replenished towards a fresh bout at the *monté* table. Then there was an evening procession of the Saint of the day (John), whose image, set upon a platform, was carried about the town, until the five or six fellows who bore the load were seen to perspire freely under its weight.

The Saint himself was a curiosity. A large wax and plaster doll, dressed in faded silk, that had once been yellow, and stuck all over with feathers and tinsel. A Catholic image Indianized, for the Mexican divinities are as much Indian as Roman. He appeared tired of the business, as the joinings between head and neck having partially given way, the former drooped over and nodded to the crowd as the image was moved along. This nodding, however, which would have been laughed at as supremely ridiculous in any other than a priest-ridden country, was here regarded in a different light. The padrés did not fail to put their interpretation upon it, pointing it out to their devout followers as a mark of condescension on the part of the Saint, who, in thus bowing to the crowd, was expressing his approbation of their proceedings. It was, in fact, a regular miracle.

So alleged both padrés and cura, and who was there to contradict them? It would have been a dangerous matter to have said nay. In San Ildefonso no man dared to disbelieve the word of the Church. The miracle worked well. The religious enthusiasm boiled up; and when St. John was returned to his niche, and the little "cofre" placed in front of him, many a "peseta," "real," and "cuartillo," were dropped in, which would otherwise have been deposited that night in the *monté* bank.

Nodding Saints and "winking Madonnas" are by no means a novel contrivance of the Holy Church. The padrés of its Mexican branch have had their wonderful saints too; and even in the almost *terra ignota* of New Mexico can be found a few of them that have performed as *smart* miracles as any recorded in the whole jugglery of the race.

A pyrotechnic display followed—and no mean exhibition of the sort neither—for in this "art" the New Mexicans are adepts. A fondness for "fireworks" is a singular but sure characteristic of a declining nation.

Give me the statistics of pyrotechnic powder burnt by a people, and I shall tell you the standard measure of their souls and bodies. If the figure be a maximum, then the physical and moral measure will be the minimum, for the ratio is inverse.

I stood in the Place de Concorde and saw a whole nation—its rich and its poor—gazing on one of these pitiful spectacles, got up for the purpose of duping them into contentment. It was the price paid them for parting with their liberty, as a child parts with a valuable gem for a few sugar-plums. They were gazing with a delight that seemed enthusiasm! I looked upon scrubby, stunted

forms, a foot shorter than were their ancestors. I looked upon eyes that gleamed with demoralized thought.

These were the representatives of a once great people, and who still deem themselves the first of mankind. I felt sure that this was an illusion. The pyro-spectacle and its reception convinced me that I saw before me a people who had passed the culminating point of their greatness, and were now gliding rapidly down the declining slope that leads to annihilation and nothingness.

After the fireworks came the "fandango." There we meet the same faces, without much alteration in the costumes. The señoras and señoritas alone have doffed their morning dresses, and here and there a pretty poblana has changed her coarse woollen "nagua" for a gay flounced muslin.

The ball was held in the large saloon of the

"Casa de Cabildo," which occupied one side of the "Plaza." On this festival day there was no exclusiveness. In the frontier towns of Mexico not much at any time, for, notwithstanding the distinctions of class, and the domineering tyranny of the government authorities, in matters of mere amusement there is a sort of democratic equality, a mingling of high and low, that in other countries is rare. English, and even American travellers, have observed this with astonishment.

All were admitted to the "Salon de baile" who chose to pay for it; and, alongside the rico in fine broad cloth you might see the ranchero in his leathern jacket and velveteen calzoneros; while the daughter of the rich commerciante danced in the same set with the "aldeana," whose time was taken up in kneading tortillas or weaving rebosos!

The Commandante with Roblado and the lieutenant figured at the fandango in full uniform. The Alcalde was there with his gold-headed cane and tassel; the *cura* in his shovel hat; the padrés in their swinging robes; and all the "familias principales" of the place.

There was the rich commerciante, Don Jose Rincon, with his fat wife and four fat sleepy-looking daughters—there, too, the wife and family of the Alcalde—there the Echevarrias, with their brother the "beau," in full Paris costume, with dress coat and crush hat—the only one to be seen in the saloon. There, too, the rich haciendado, Señor Gomez del Monté, with his lean wife and several rather lean daughters—differing in that respect from the hundreds of kine that roam over the pastures of his "ganada." And there, too, observed of all, was the lovely Catalina de

Cruces, the daughter of the wealthy miner, Don Ambrosio, who himself is by her side, keeping a watchful eye upon her.

Besides these grand people there were employés of the mines of less note, clerks of the commerciantes, young farmers of the valley, gambucinos, vaqueros, ciboleros, and even "*leperos*," of the town, shrouded in their cheap serapés. A motley throng was the fandango.

The music consisted of a bandolon, a harp and fiddle, and the dances were the waltz, the *bolero*, and the *coona*. It is but just to say that finer dancing could not have been witnessed in the saloons of Paris. Even the peon, in his leathern spencer and calzoneros, moved as gracefully as a professor of the art; and the poblanas, in their short skirts and gay-coloured slippers, swept over the floor like so many coryphées of the ballet.

Roblado, as usual, was pressing his attentions on Catalina, and danced almost every set with her; but her eye wandered from his gold epaulettes and seemed to search the room for some other object. She was evidently indifferent to the remarks of her partner, and tired of his company.

Vizcarra's eyes were also in search of some one that did not appear to be present, for the Commandante strolled to and fro, peering into every group and corner with a dissatisfied look.

If it was the fair blonde he was looking for, he would be unsuccessful. She was not there. Rosita and her mother had returned home after the exhibition of the fire-works. Their house was far down the valley, and they had gone to it, accompanied by Carlos and the young ranchero. These, however, had returned to be present at the

fandango. It was late before they made their appearance, the road having detained them. This was why the eye of Catalina wandered. Unlike Vizcarra, however, she was not to meet with disappointment.

While the dance was going on two young men entered the saloon, and soon mingled with the company. One of them was the young ranchero, the other was Carlos. The latter might easily have been distinguished by the heron-plume that waved over his black sombrero.

The eye of Catalina was no longer restless. It was now directed upon an object, though its glances were not fixed, but quick and stolen—stolen, because of the observation of an angry father and a jealous lover.

Carlos assumed indifference, though his heart was burning. What would he not have given to have danced with her? But

he knew the situation too well. He knew that the offer of such a thing would lead to a scene. He dared not propose it.

At times he fancied that she had ceased to regard him—that she even listened with interest to Roblado—to the beau Echevarria—to others. This was but Catalina's fine acting. It was meant for other eyes than those of Carlos, but he knew not that, and became piqued.

He grew reckless, and danced. He chose for his partner a very pretty "aldeana," Iñez Gonzales by name, who was delighted to dance with him. Catalina saw this, and became jealous in turn.

This play continued for a length of time, but Carlos at length grew tired of his partner, and sat down upon the *banqueta* alone. His eyes followed the movements of Catalina. He saw that hers were bent

upon him with glances of love,—love that had been avowed in words — yes, had already been plighted upon oath. Why should they suspect each other?

The confidence of both hearts was restored; and now the excitement of the dance, and the less zealous guardianship of Don Ambrosio, half drunk with wine, gave confidence to their eyes, and they gazed more boldly and frequently at one another.

The ring of dancers whirling round the room passed close to where Carlos sat. It was a waltz. Catalina was waltzing with the beau Echevarria. At each circle her face was towards Carlos, and then their eyes met. In these transient but oft-recurring glances, the eyes of a Spanish maid will speak volumes, and Carlos was reading in those of Catalina a pleasant tale. As she came round the room for the third time, he noticed

something held between her fingers, which rested over the shoulder of her partner. It was a sprig with leaves of a dark greenish hue. When passing close to him, the sprig, dexterously detached, fell upon his knees, while he could just hear, uttered in a soft whisper, the word—"*Tuya!*"

Carlos caught the sprig, which was a branch of "tuya," or cedar. He well understood its significance; and after pressing it to his lips, he passed it through the buttonhole of his embroidered "jaqueta."

As Catalina came round again, the glances exchanged between them were those of mutual and confiding love.

* * * * *

The night wore on — Don Ambrosio at length became sleepy, and carried off his daughter, escorted by Roblado.

Soon after most of the ricos and fashion-

ables left the saloon, but some tireless votaries of Terpsichore still lingered until the rosy Aurora peeped through the "rejas" of the Casa de Cabildo.

## CHAPTER X.

The "Llano Estacado," or "Staked Plain" of the hunters, is one of the most singular formations of the Great American Prairie. It is a table-land, or "steppe," rising above the regions around it to a height of nearly one thousand feet, and of an oblong, or leg-of-mutton form, trending from north to south.

It is four hundred miles in length, and at its widest part between two and three hundred. Its superficial area is about equal to the island of Ireland! Its surface aspect differs considerably from the rest of prairie-land, nor is it of uniform appearance in every part. Its

northern division consists of an arid steppe, sometimes treeless, for an extent of fifty miles, and sometimes having a stunted covering of mezquite (*acacia*), of which there are two distinct species. This steppe is in several places rent by chasms a thousand feet in depth, and walled in on both sides by rugged, impassable precipices. Vast masses of shapeless rocks lie along the beds of these great clefts, and pools of water appear at long intervals, while stunted cedars grow among the rocks, or cling from the seams of the cliffs.

Such chasms, called "cañons," can only be crossed, or even entered, at certain points; and these passes are frequently a score of miles distant from each other.

On the upper plain the surface is often a dead level for a hundred miles, and as firm as a macadamized road. There are spots

covered with a turf of grass of the varieties known as gramma, buffalo, and mezquite; and sometimes the traveller encounters a region where shallow ponds of different sizes stud the plain—a few being permanent, and surrounded by sedge. Most of these ponds are more or less brackish, some sulphurous, and others perfectly salt. After heavy rains such aqueous deposits are more numerous, and their waters sweeter; but rain seems to fall by accident over this desolate region, and after long spells of drought the greater number of these ponds disappear altogether.

Towards the southern end of the Llano Estacado the surface exhibits a very singular phenomenon — a belt of sand-hills, nearly twenty miles in breadth and full fifty in length, stretching north and south upon the plain. These hills are of pure white sand, thrown up in ridges, and sometimes in cones, to the

height of a hundred feet, and without tree, bush, or shrub, to break their soft outlines, or the uniformity of their colour. But the greatest anomaly of this geological puzzle is, that water-ponds are found in their very midst—even among their highest ridges—and this water not occasional, as from rains, but lying in "lagunas," with reeds, rushes, and *nymphæ*, growing in them, to attest that the water is permanent! The very last place where water might be expected to make a lodgement.

Such formations of drift-sand are common upon the shores of the Mexican Gulf, as well as on European coasts, and there their existence is easily explained; but here, in the very heart of a continent, it cannot be regarded as less than a singular phenomenon.

This sand-belt is passable at one or two points, but horses sink to the knees at every

step, and but for the water it would be a perilous experiment to cross it.

Where is the Llano Estacado? Unrol your map of North America. You will perceive a large river called the Canadian rising in the Rocky Mountains, and running, first southerly, and then east, until it becomes part of the Arkansas. As this river bends eastwardly it brushes the northern end of the Llano Estacado, whose bluffs sometimes approach close to its banks, and at other times are seen far off, resembling a range of mountains—for which they have been frequently mistaken by travellers.

The boundary of the west side of the "Staked Plain" is more definite. Near the head-waters of the Canadian another large river has its source. This is the Pecos. Its course, you will observe, is nearly south, but your map is not correct, as for several hundred

miles the Pecos runs within a few degrees of east. It afterwards takes a southerly direction, before it reaches its embouchure in the Rio Grande. Now the Pecos washes the whole western base of the Llano Estacado; and it is this very plain, elevated as it is, that turns the Pecos into its southerly course, instead of leaving it to flow eastward, like all the other prairie streams that head in the Rocky Mountains.

The eastern boundary of the Llano Estacado is not so definitely marked, but a line of some three hundred miles from the Pecos, and cutting the head-waters of the Wichita, the Louisiana Red, the Brazos, and Colorado, will give some idea of its outline. These rivers, and their numerous tributaries, all head in the eastern "ceja" (brow) of the Staked Plain, which is cut and channelled by

their streams into tracts of the most rugged and fantastic forms.

At the south the Llano Estacado tapers to a point, declining into the mezquite plains and valleys of numerous small streams that debouch into the Lower Rio Grande.

This singular tract is without one fixed dweller; even the Indian never makes abode upon it beyond the few hours necessary to rest from his journey, and there are parts where he—inured as he is to hunger and thirst — dare not venture to cross it. So perilous is the "jornada," or crossing of the Llano Estacado, that throughout all its length of four hundred miles there are only two places where travellers can effect it in safety! The danger springs from the want of water, for there are spots of grass in abundance; but

even on the well-known routes there are, at certain seasons, stretches of sixty and eighty miles where not a drop of water is to be procured !

In earlier times one of these routes was known as the " Spanish Trail," from Santa Fé to San Antonio de Bexar, of Texas; and lest travellers should lose their way, several points were marked with "palos," or stakes. Hence the name it has received.

The Llano Estacado is now rarely travelled, except by the ciboleros, or Mexican buffalo-hunters, and " Comancheros," or Indian traders. Parties of these cross it from the settlements of New Mexico, for the purpose of hunting the buffalo, and trafficking with the Indian tribes that roam over the plains to the east. Neither the hunt nor the traffic is of any great importance, but it satisfies a singular race of men, whom chance or incli-

nation has led to the adopting it as a means of subsistence.

These men are to the Mexican frontier pretty much what the hunter and back-woodsman are upon the borders of the Anglo-American settlements. They are, however, in many respects different from the latter—in arms and equipments, modes of hunting, and otherwise.

The outfit of a cibolero, who is usually also a *coureur de bois*, is very simple. For hunting, he is mounted on a tolerable—sometimes a fine—horse; and armed with a bow and arrows, a hunting-knife, and a long lance. Of fire-arms he knows and cares nothing—though there are exceptional cases. A lazo is an important part of his equipment. For trading, his stock of goods is very limited—often not costing him twenty dollars! A few bags of coarse bread (an article of food

which the prairie Indians are fond of), a sack of "piñole," some baubles for Indian ornament, some coarse serapés, and pieces of high-coloured woollen stuffs, woven at home: these constitute his "invoice." Hardware goods he does not furnish to any great extent. These stand him too high in his own market, as they reach it only after long carriage and scandalous imposts. Fire-arms he has nothing to do with: such prairie Indians as use these are furnished from the eastern side; but many Spanish pieces — fusils and escopettes — have got into the hands of the Comanches through their forays upon the Mexican towns of the south.

In return for his outlay and perilous journey, the cibolero carries back dried buffalo-flesh and hides — some the produce of his own hunting, some procured by barter from the Indians.

Horses, mules, and asses, are also articles of exchange. Of these the prairie Indians possess vast herds — some individuals owning hundreds; and most of them with Mexican brands! In other words, they have been stolen from the towns of the *Lower* Rio Grande, to be sold to the towns of the *Upper* Rio Grande, and the trade is deemed perfectly legitimate, — at least, there is no help for it as the case stands.

The cibolero goes forth on the plains with a rare escort. Sometimes a large number of these men, taking their wives and families with them, travel together just like a tribe of wild Indians. Generally, however, one or two leaders, with their servants and equipage, form the expedition. They experience less molestation from the savages than ordinary travellers. The Comanches and other tribes know their object, and rather encourage them to

come amongst them. Notwithstanding, they are often cheated and ill-used by these double-faced dealers. Their mode of transport is the pack-mule and the "carreta," drawn by mules or oxen. The carreta is of itself a picture of primitive locomotion. A pair of block-wheels, cut out of a cotton-wood tree, are joined by a stout wooden axle. The wheels usually approach nearer to the oval, or square, than the circular form. A long tongue leads out from the axle-tree, and upon top of this a square, deep, box-like body is placed. To this two or more pairs of oxen are attached in the most simple manner—by lashing a cross-piece of wood to their horns which has already been made fast to the tongue. The animals have neither yoke nor harness, and the forward push of the head is the motive power by which the carreta is propelled. Once in motion, the noise

of the wooden axle is such as to defy description. The cries of a whole family, with children of all sizes, in bitter agony, can alone represent the concert of terrible sounds; and we must go to South Mexico to find its horrid equal in a troop of howling monkeys.

## CHAPTER XI.

About a week after the fiesta of St. John, a small party of ciboleros was seen crossing the Pecos, at the ford of the "Bosque Redondo." The party was only five in number, and consisted of a white man, a half-blood, and three pure-bred Indians, having with them a small *atajo* of pack-mules, and three ox-team carretas. The crouching trot of the Indians, as well as their tilma dresses and sandalled feet, showed that they were "Indios manzos." They were, in fact, the hired *peons* of Carlos the cibolero—the white man, and chief of the party.

The half-blood—Antonio by name—was "arriero" of the mule-train, while the three

Indians drove the ox-teams, guiding them across the ford with their long goads. Carlos himself was mounted upon his fine black horse, and, muffled in a strong serapé, rode in front to pilot the way. His beautiful manga had been left behind, partly to save it from the rough wear of such an expedition, and also that it might not excite the cupidity of the prairie Indians, who, for such a brilliant mantle as it was, would not hesitate to take his scalp. Besides the manga, the embroidered jacket, the scarlet scarf, and velveteen calzoneros, had all been put off, and others of a coarser kind were now worn in their place.

This was an important expedition for Carlos. He carried with him the largest freight he had ever taken upon the prairies. Besides the three carretas with four oxen each, the atajo consisted of five pack-mules, all loaded

with merchandise — the carretas with bread, piñole, Spanish beans, Chilé peppers; and the packs were made up of serapé blankets, coarse woollen cloth, and a few showy trinkets, as also some Spanish knives, with their pointed triangular blades. It was his bold luck on the day of the fiesta that had enabled him to provide such a stock. In addition to his own original onza and the two he had won, the young ranchero, Don Juan, had insisted upon his accepting the loan of five others towards an outfit for this expedition.

The little troop, having safely forded the Pecos, headed towards the "ceja" of the Llano Estacado, that was not far distant from the crossing of Bosque Redondo. A sloping ravine brought them to the top of the "mesa," where a firm level road lay before them — a smooth plain without break or bush to guide them on their course.

But the cibolero needed no guide. No man knew the Staked Plain better than he; and, setting his horse's head in a direction a little south of east, the train moved on. He was striking for one of the head branches of the Red River of Louisiana, where he had heard that for several seasons past the buffalo had appeared in great numbers. It was a new route for him—as most of his former expeditions had been made to the upper forks of the Texan rivers Brazos and Colorado. But the plains around these rivers were at this time in undisputed possession of the powerful tribe of Comanches, and their allies, the Kiawas, Lipans, and Tonkewas. Hence, these Indians, uninterrupted in their pursuit of the buffalo, had rendered the latter wild and difficult of approach, and had also thinned their numbers. On the waters of the Red River the case was dif-

ferent. This was hostile ground. The Wacoes, Pānés, Osages, and bands from the Cherokee, Kickapoo, and other nations to the east, occasionally hunted there, and sanguinary conflicts occurred among them; so that one party or another often lost their season's hunt by the necessity of keeping out of each other's range; and the game was thus left undisturbed. It is a well-known fact that in a neutral or "hostile ground," the buffalo, as well as other game, are found in greatest abundance, and are there more easily approached than elsewhere.

With a knowledge of these facts, Carlos the cibolero had determined to risk an expedition to the Red River, whose head-waters have their source in the eastern "ceja" of the Llano Estacado, and *not* in the Rocky Mountains as laid down upon maps.

Carlos was well armed for hunting the buffalo—so was the half-blood Antonio—and two of the three peons were also experienced hunters. Their arms consisted of the bow and lance, both weapons being preferable to fire-arms for buffalo-hunting. In one of the carretas, however, might be seen a weapon of another kind—a long brown American rifle. This Carlos kept for other and higher game, and he well knew how to use it. But how came such a weapon into the hands of a Mexican cibolero? Remember Carlos was not of Mexican origin. The weapon was a family relic. It had been his father's.

We shall not follow Carlos and his "caravan" through all the details of their weary "journeyings" across the desert plain. At one place they made a "jornada" of

seventy miles without water. But the experienced Carlos knew how to accomplish this without the loss of a single animal.

He travelled thus. Having given his cattle as much as they would drink at the last watering-place, he started in the afternoon, and travelled until near daybreak. Then a halt of two hours was made, so that the animals should graze while the dew was still on the grass. Another long march followed, continuing until noon, then a rest of three or four hours brought the cool evening, when a fresh spell of marching brought the "jornada" to its end, far on in the following night. Such is the mode of travelling still practised on the desert steppes of Chihuahua, Sonora, and North Mexico.

After several days' travelling the cibolero and his party descended from the high "mesa,"

and, passing down its eastern slope, arrived on a tributary of the Red River. Here the scenery assumed a new aspect—the aspect of the "rolling" prairie. Gentle declivities, with soft rounded tops declining into smooth verdant vales, along which meandered streams of clear and sparkling water. Here and there along the banks stood groves of trees, such as the evergreen live-oak, the beautiful "pecan" with its oblong edible nuts, the "overcup" with its odd-looking acorns, the hackberry with its nettle-shaped leaves and sweet fruits, and the silvery cotton-wood. Along the swells could be seen large trees standing apart, and at almost equal distances, as though planted for an orchard. Their full leafy tops gave them a fine appearance, and their light pinnate leaves, with the long brown legumes hanging from their branches, told they were the famous

"mezquite" trees—the American acacia. The red mulberry could be seen in the creek bottoms, and here and there the beautiful wild-china tree with its pretty lilac flowers. The whole surface both of hill and valley was clad in a rich mantle of short *buffalo* grass, which gave it the aspect of a meadow lately mown, and springing into fresh verdure. It was a lovely landscape, and no wonder the wild bulls of the prairies chose it for their favourite range.

The cibolero had not travelled far through this favoured region until he came upon the buffalo sign—"roads," "wallows," and "bois de vache;" and next morning he found himself in the midst of vast herds, roaming about like tame cattle, and browsing at their leisure. So little shy were they, they scarce deigned to make off at his approach!

Of course he had reached the end of

his journey. This was his great stock-farm. These were his own cattle—as much his as any one else's; and he had nothing more to do but set to killing and curing.

As to his trade with the Indians, that would take place whenever he should chance to fall in with a party—which he would be certain to do in the course of the season.

Like all men of the prairie, rude trappers as well as Indians, Carlos had an eye for the picturesque, and therefore chose a beautiful spot for his camp. It was a grassy bottom, through which ran a clear "arroyo" of sweet water, shaded by pecan, mulberry, and wild-china trees, and under the shadow of a mulberry grove his carretas were halted, and his tent was pitched.

## CHAPTER XII.

Carlos had commenced his hunt, and was making rapid progress. In the first two days he had slaughtered no less than twenty buffaloes, and had them all carried to camp. He and Antonio followed the buffalo, and shot them down, while two of the peons skinned the animals, cut up the meat, and packed it to camp. There, under the hands of the third, it underwent the further process of being "jerked," that is, cut into thin slices and dried in the sun.

The hunt promised to be profitable. Carlos would no doubt obtain as much "tasajo" as he could carry home, besides a large supply

of hides, both of which found ready sale in the towns of New Mexico.

On the third day, however, the hunters noticed a change in the behaviour of the buffalo. They had suddenly grown wild and wary. Now and then vast gangs passed them, running at full speed, as if terrified and pursued! It was not Carlos and his companion that had so frighted them. What then had set them a running?

Carlos conjectured that some Indian tribe was in the neighbourhood, engaged in hunting them.

His conjecture proved correct. On ascending a ridge which gave him a view of a beautiful valley beyond, his eye rested upon an Indian encampment.

It consisted of about fifty lodges, standing like tents along the edge of the valley, and fronting towards the stream. They were of

a conical form, constructed of a framework of poles set in a circle, drawn together at their tops, and then covered with skins of the buffalo.

"Waco lodges!" said the cibolero, the moment his practised eye fell upon them.

"Master," inquired Antonio, "how do you tell that?" Antonio's experience fell far short of that of his master, who from childhood had spent his life on the prairies.

"How!" replied Carlos, "by the lodges themselves."

"I should have taken it for a Comanche camp," said the half-blood. "I have seen just such lodges among the 'Buffalo-eaters.'"

"Not so, Anton," rejoined his master. "In the Comanche lodge the poles meet at the top, and are covered over with the skins, leaving no outlet for smoke. You observe it is not so with these. They are

lodges of the Wacoes, who, it is true, are allies of the Comanches."

Such was in reality the fact. The poles, though bent so as to approach each other at the top, did not quite meet, and an open hole remained for the passage of smoke. The lodge, therefore, was not a perfect cone, but the frustum of one; and in this it differed from the lodge of the Comanches.

"The Wacoes are not hostile," remarked the cibolero. "I think we have nothing to fear from them. No doubt they will trade with us. But where are they?" This question was drawn forth by the cibolero observing that not a creature was to be seen about the lodges,—neither man, woman, child, nor animal! And yet it could not be a deserted camp. Indians would not abandon such lodges as these

—at least they would not leave behind the fine robes that covered them! No, the owners must be near: no doubt, among the neighbouring hills, in pursuit of the buffalo.

The cibolero guessed aright. As he and his companion stood looking down upon the encampment, a loud shouting reached their ears, and the next moment a body of several hundred horsemen was seen approaching over a swell of the prairie. They were riding slowly, but their panting foaming horses showed that they had just left off harder work. Presently another band, still more numerous, appeared in the rear. These were horses and mules laden with huge brown masses, the buffalo-meat packed up in the shaggy hides. This train was conducted by the women and boys, and followed by troops of dogs and screaming children.

As they came toward the encampment

from an opposite direction, Carlos and his companion were not for a while seen.

The Indians, however, had not been long among the lodges before the quick eye of one caught sight of their two heads above the ridge. A warning cry was uttered, and in a moment every one of the dismounted hunters was back in his saddle and ready for action. One or two galloped off towards the meat-train, which had not yet come into camp, while others rode to and fro, exhibiting symptoms of alarm.

No doubt they were under apprehensions that the Pānés, their mortal foes, had stolen a march upon them.

Carlos soon relieved them from this apprehension. Spurring his horse to the crest of the ridge, he drew up in full view of the Indians. A few signs, which

he well knew how to make, and the word "amigo!" shouted at the top of his voice, restored their confidence; then a young fellow now rode out in front, and advanced up the hill. When sufficiently near to be heard, he halted; and a conversation, partly by signs, and partly by means of a little Spanish, enabled him and Carlos to understand each other. The Indian then galloped back, and, after a short interval, returned again, and invited the cibolero and his companion to the encampment.

Carlos of course accepted the courtesy, and a few minutes after he and Antonio were eating fresh buffalo beef, and chatting in perfect amity with their new hosts.

The chief, a fine-looking man, and evidently possessing full authority, became particularly friendly with Carlos, and was much pleased at hearing that the latter had a stock

of goods. He promised to visit his camp next morning and allow his tribe to trade. As the cibolero had conjectured, they were Waco Indians,—a noble race, one of the noblest of the prairie tribes.

Carlos returned to his camp in high spirits. He would now have his goods exchanged for mules,—so the chief promised,—and these were the main objects of his expedition.

In the morning, according to appointment, the Indians arrived, chief and all; and the little valley where the cibolero had encamped was filled with men, women, and children. The packs were opened, the goods were set forth, and the whole day was spent in continuous trading. The cibolero found his customers perfectly honest; and when night came, and they took their departure, not a single item of Carlos' stock remained on

his hands. In its place, however, a handsome *mulada* of no less than thirty mules was seen picketed in the bottom of the little valley. These were now the property of Carlos the cibolero. Not a bad outlay of his eight onzas!

Not only would they yield well on his return, but it was his intention that each of them should carry back its full load of buffalo-hides, or "tasajo."

It would be a successful expedition, indeed; and dreams of future wealth, with the hope of being some day in a condition to advance a legitimate claim to the hand of the fair Catalina, were already passing through the mind of Carlos.

Once a "rico," reflected he, even Don Ambrosio might sanction his suit. On that night soft was the slumber and pleasant the dreams of Carlos the cibolero.

## CHAPTER XIII.

Next day he followed his hunting with increased ardour. He was now provided with the means of transport to any amount. There was no fear he should have to leave either his robes or tasajo behind. With his own mules, he had now thirty-five; and that number with the three carretas would carry a splendid freight—of the value of hundreds of dollars.

He had already obtained some dressed robes from the Indians. For these he had parted with everything for which an Indian would trade. Even the buttons from off his jacket and those of his men, the bullion bands and shining tags of their sombreros—everything about them that glittered!

Their arms of course not. These the Wacoes did not want. They had similar ones themselves, and could manufacture them at will. They would have purchased the long brown rifle; but that was a souvenir Carlos would not have parted with for a score of mules.

For the next day or two the cibolero continued his hunting. He found the buffalo grow every hour more excited and wild. He noticed, too, that the "running" gangs came from the north, while the Wacoes were hunting to the southward of his camp! It could not be the latter that were disturbing them. Who then?

On the third night after his trade with the Indians, Carlos had retired to rest with his people. Antonio kept watch until midnight, at which hour he was to be relieved by one of the peons.

Antonio had grown very sleepy. His hard riding after the buffalo had wearied him; and he was doing his best to keep awake for the last half-hour of his vigil, when a snort reached his ears from the direction of the *mulada*.

This brought him to himself. He placed his ear to the ground and listened. Another snort louder than the first came from the *mulada*—another—and another—quick in succession!

"What can it mean? Coyotés? or perhaps a bear? I shall wake my master," said Antonio to himself.

Stealing gently to the side of Carlos, the half-blood shook the sleeper by the arm. A slight shake was enough, for in an instant the cibolero was upon his feet and handling his rifle. He always resorted to this weapon in cases of danger, such as a hostile attack by Indians, using his bow only in the chase.

After a word or two had passed between Carlos and Antonio the three peons were awaked, and all five stood to their arms. The little party remained in the midst of the carretas, which had been drawn up so as to form a small triangular corral. The high boxes of these would be an excellent protection against arrows; and, as there was no fire in the camp to make a light, they could not be seen from without. The camp, moreover, was shadowed by the thick foliage of the mulberries, which rendered it still more obscure; while its occupants commanded a view of the prairie in front. But for the wood copses which stood at intervals, they could have seen the whole ground both up and down the valley and along its sides. These copses, however, might have concealed any number of foes.

The hunters remained silent listening

intently. At one time they fancied they could see a dark form crouching along the ground in the direction of the *mulada*, that was picketed not a hundred yards off. The light, however, was so uncertain, not one of the five could be sure of this. Whatever it was, it moved very slowly, for it appeared to remain near the same spot.

Carlos at length set himself to observe it more closely. He stole out from the corral, and, followed by Antonio, crawled along the ground. When the two had got nearer the dark object, it was distinctly seen to move.

"There *is* something!" whispered the cibolero.

At that moment the mules again snorted, and one or two of them struck the ground with their hoofs, as if startled.

"It must be a bear, I fancy," continued Carlos. "It has the appearance of one. It

will stampede the animals—a shot will be less likely to do so."

As he said this he raised his rifle, and, taking aim as well as the darkness would allow him, pulled trigger, and fired.

It seemed as if the shot had invoked all the demons of the infernal regions. A hundred voices burst forth in one simultaneous yell, the hoofs of a hundred horses rang upon the turf, the *mulada* got into motion, the mules squealing and plunging violently, and the next moment every one of them had broken their lariats, and were running at a furious gallop out of the valley! A dark band of yelling horsemen was seen closing in after and driving them off; and, before Carlos could recover from his surprise, both mules and Indians had disappeared out of sight and hearing!

Not a single one remained of the whole

*mulada*. The ground upon which they had been picketed was swept perfectly clear!

"An estampeda!" said the cibolero, in a husky voice; "my poor mules—all gone—every one of them! A curse upon Indian duplicity!"

Carlos had not the slightest doubt but that the marauders were the Wacoes—the very same from whom he had purchased the mules. He knew that such an occurrence was by no means rare—that oftentimes the traders are robbed in this way; and not unusual is it for them to purchase a second time the very animals thus carried off, and from the same Indians who have stolen them!

"A curse upon Indian duplicity!" he repeated, with indignant emphasis. "No wonder they were so free and generous in their barter! It was but a plot on the part of the cowardly thieves to take from me my

whole cargo, without daring to do so openly. *Carajo!* I am lost!"

This last phrase was uttered in a tone that partook equally of anger and grief.

The cibolero was certainly placed in an unpleasant situation. All his hopes—lately running so high—were crushed in a single moment. His whole property taken from him—the object of his enterprise lost—his long, perilous, and painful journeyings made for nothing. He should return empty-handed, poorer than when he set out—for his own five pack-mules were gone among the rest. The oxen, and his faithful steed, tied to the carretas, alone remained. These would scarce serve to carry provision for himself and party on their journey home; no cargo—not a bale of hides—not a "bulta" of meat more than would be required for their own food!

These reflections all passed through the

mind of the cibolero in the space of a few moments, as he stood gazing in the direction in which the marauders had gone. He made no attempt to follow—that would have been worse than useless. On his splendid horse he might have overtaken them—only to die on the points of their lances!

"A curse upon Indian duplicity!" he once more repeated; and then, rising to his feet, walked back to the corral, and gave orders for the oxen to be drawn close up and firmly fastened to the carretas. Another surprise might be attempted by some lingering party of the savages; and, as it would be unsafe to go to sleep, the cibolero and his four companions remained awake and on the alert for the remainder of the night.

## CHAPTER XIV.

That was a *noche triste* to Carlos — a night of painful reflections. Bereft of his property—in the midst of hostile Indians, who might change their minds, return, and massacre him and his party—many hundred miles from home, or from any settlement of whites —a wide desert to be traversed—the further discouragement that there was no object for his going home, now that he was stripped of all his trading-stock—perhaps to be laughed at on his return—no prospect of satisfaction or indemnity, for he well knew that his government would send out no expedition to revenge so humble an individual as he was

—he knew, in fact, that no expedition of Spanish soldiery could penetrate to the place, even if they had the will; but to fancy Vizcarra and Roblado sending one on his account! No, no; there was no hope of his obtaining satisfaction. He was cruelly robbed, and he knew that he must endure it; but what a blighted prospect was before him!

As soon as day broke he would go to the Waco camp—he would boldly upbraid them for their treachery. But what purpose would that serve? Besides, would he find them still there? No; most likely they were moving off to some other part at the time they had planned the robbery!

Several times during the night a wild idea occurred to him. If he could not have indemnity he might obtain revenge. The Wacoes were not without enemies. Several bordering tribes were at war with them; and

Carlos knew they had a powerful foe in the Pānés.

"My fortune is bitter," thought Carlos; "but revenge is sweet! What if I seek the Pāné,—tell him my intention,—offer him my lance, my bow, and my true rifle? I have never met the Pāné. I know him not; but I am no weak hand, and now that I have a cause for vengeance, he will not despise my aid. My men will follow me—I know they will—anywhere; and, tame 'Tagnos' though they be, they can fight when roused to revenge. I shall seek the Pāné!"

The last thought was uttered half aloud, and with emphasis that spoke determination. The cibolero was a man of quick resolves, and this resolve he had actually come to. It is not to be wondered at. His indignation at being treated in such a cruel and cowardly manner—the poor prospect before him on

returning to the settlement—his natural desire to punish those who had placed him in such a predicament—as well as some hope which he still entertained of recovering, at least a part of his lost property, all influenced him to this resolve. He had determined upon it, and was just on the point of communicating his determination to his companions, when he was interrupted by the half-blood Antonio.

"Master," said the latter, who appeared to have been for some time busied with his own thoughts, "did you notice nothing strange?"

"When, Antonio?"

"During the estampeda?"

"What was there strange?"

"Why, there appeared to be a good number, full half, of the rascals a-foot."

"True; I observed that."

"Now, master, I have seen a *cavallada*

stampeded by the Comanches more than once —they were always mounted."

"What signifies that? These are Wacoes, not Comanches."

"True, master; but I have heard that the Wacoes, like the Comanches, are true *horse*-Indians, and never go a-foot on any business."

"That is indeed so," replied the cibolero, in a reflective mood. "Something strange, I confess."

"But, master," continued the half-blood, "did you notice nothing else strange during the stampede?"

"No," answered Carlos; "I was so annoyed—so put out by the loss, I scarce noticed anything. What else, Antonio?"

"Why, in the midst of these yellings, did you not hear a shrill whoop now and then—a *whistle?*"

"Ha! did *you* hear that?"

"More than once—distinctly."

"Where were my ears?" asked the cibolero of himself; "you are sure, Antonio?"

"Quite sure, master."

Carlos remained for a moment silent, evidently engaged in busy reflection. After a pause, he broke out in a half-soliloquy:—

"It may have been—it must have been—by heavens! it must——"

"What, master?"

"The Pāné whistle!"

"Just what I was thinking, master. The Comanches never whoop so—the Kiawa never. I have not heard that the Wacoes give such a signal. Why not Pāné? Besides, their being a-foot—that's like Pāné!"

A sudden revulsion had taken place in the mind of the cibolero. There was every probability that Antonio's conjecture was

correct. The "whistle" is a peculiar signal of the Pāné tribes. Moreover, the fact of so many of the marauders being on foot—that was another peculiarity. Carlos knew, that among the Southern Indians such a tactic is never resorted to. The Pānés are *horse*-Indians too, but on their marauding expeditions to the South, they often go a-foot, trusting to return mounted — which they almost invariably do.

"After all," thought Carlos, "I have been wronging the Wacoes — the robbers are Pānés!"

But now a new suspicion entered his mind. It was still the Wacoes that had done it. They had adopted the Pāné whistle to deceive him! A party of them might easily be a-foot—it was not such a distance to their camp,—besides, after the estampeda they had gone in that very direction!

No doubt, should he go there on the morrow, they would tell him that Pānés were in the neighbourhood, that it was they who had stolen his mules—the mules of course he would not see, as these would be safely concealed among the hills.

"No, Antonio," he said, after making these reflections, "our enemies are the Wacoes themselves."

"Master," replied Antonio, "I hope not."

"I hope not, too, camarado. I had taken a fancy to our friends of but yesterday: I should be sorry to find them our foes—but I fear it is even so."

With all, Carlos was not confident; and now that he reflected, another circumstance came to his mind in favour of the Wacoes. His companions had also noted it.

That circumstance was the running of the buffaloes observed during the past few days.

The gangs had passed from the north going southward; and their excited manner was almost a proof that they were pressed by a party of hunters. The Wacoes were all this time hunting to the south of the cibolero's camp! This would seem to indicate that some other Indians were upon the north. What more likely than a band of Pānés?

Again Carlos reproached himself for his too hasty suspicions of his new friends. His mind was filled with doubts. Perhaps these would be resolved by the light of the morning.

As soon as day should arrive, he had resolved to go to the Waco camp, and satisfy himself, or at all events openly make his inquiries.

* * * * *

The first streaks of daylight were just falling upon the prairie, when the quick keen

eye of the half-blood, ranging the ground in every direction, was arrested by the appearance of something odd upon the grass. It lay near the spot where the *mulada* had been picketed. It was a darkish object in a recumbent position. Was it bushes or gorse? No. It could not be that. Its outlines were different. It was more like some animal lying down — perhaps a large wolf? It was near the place where they had fancied that they saw something in the darkness, and at which Carlos had fired.

Antonio, on first perceiving the object, called his master's attention to it, and both now gazed over the box of the carreta, scanning it, as well as the grey light would permit them.

As this became brighter, the object was seen more distinctly, while at each moment the curiosity of the ciboleros increased. They

would have long since gone out to examine it more closely; but they were not yet free from apprehensions of a second attack from the Indians; and they prudently remained within the corral.

At length, however, they could forego an examination no longer. They had formed their suspicion of what the object was; and Carlos and Antonio climbed over the carretas, and proceeded towards it.

On arriving at the spot, they were not so much surprised—for they had partially anticipated such a thing—at finding the body of a dead Indian! It was lying flat upon the grass, face downwards; and, on closer examination, a wound, from which much blood had run, was perceived in the side. There was the mark of a rifle bullet—Carlos had not fired in vain!

They bent down, and turned over the

body to examine it. The savage was in full war-costume—that is, naked to the waist, and painted over the breast and face so as to render him as frightful as possible: but what struck the ciboleros as most significant was the *costume of his head!* This was close shaven over the temples and behind the ears. A patch upon the top was clipped short, but in the centre of the crown one long lock of hair remained uncut, and this lock was intermingled with plumes, and plaited so as to hang, queue-like, down the back. The naked temples were stained with vermilion, and the cheeks and bosom daubed in a similar manner. These brilliant spots contrasted with the colourless and deathly hue of the skin, and with the blanched lips and glazed eye-balls, gave to the corpse a hideous appearance.

Carlos, after gazing upon it for some

moments, turned to his companion with a look of intelligence; and, pointing to the shaved head, and then to the moccasins upon the Indian's feet, in a tone that expressed the satisfaction he felt at the discovery, pronounced the word,—

"Pāné!"

## CHAPTER XV.

The dead Indian was a Pāné beyond doubt. The tonsure of his hair, the cut of his moccasins, his war-paint, enabled Carlos to tell this.

The cibolero was glad that he was a Pāné. He had several reasons for being so. First, it gratified him to know that his Waco friends were still true. Secondly, that he had punished one of the robbers; and, lastly, the knowledge that there were Pānés gave him some hope that he might yet recover, *by the help of the Wacoes,* some of the stolen mules!

This was not improbable. As already

stated, the Wacoes and Pānés were sworn foes; and as soon as the former should hear that the latter were in the neighbourhood, Carlos felt sure they would go in pursuit of them. He would share in this pursuit with his little band, and, in the event of the Pānés being defeated, might get back his *mulada*.

His first impulse, therefore, was, to gallop to the Waco camp—apprise them of the fact that the Pāné was on the war-trail, and then join them in search of the latter.

Just then both he and Antonio remembered that the Pānés had themselves gone in the direction of the Waco camp! It was not two miles distant—they could hardly fail to find it, even in the night! What if they had taken the Wacoes by surprise, and had already made their attack!

It was quite probable—more than probable. The time and the hour were just in

keeping. The estampeda had occurred before midnight. No doubt they were then on their way to the Waco village! They would just be in time to make their attack, at the usual hour for such forays, between midnight and morning!

Carlos feared he might be too late to give warning. His Waco friends may have already perished! Whether or no, he determined to proceed at once to their encampment.

Leaving Antonio and the peons with directions to guard and defend his own camp to the last, he rode off, armed both with rifle and bow. It was yet but grey day, but he knew the trail leading to the Waco village, and followed it without difficulty. He rode with caution, scanning the timber copses before approaching them; and running his eye along the crests of the ridges as he advanced.

This caution was not unnecessary. The

Pānés could not be far off — they might still be in ambush between him and the Waco camp, or halted among the hills.

The cibolero had but little fear of meeting one or two of them. He rode a horse in which he had full confidence; and he knew that no Pāné could overtake him; but he might be surrounded by numbers, and intercepted before he could reach the Waco lodges. That was the reason why he advanced with so much caution.

His ears were set to listen attentively. Every sound was noted and weighed — the "gobble" of the wild turkey from the branches of the oak; the drumming of the ruffed grouse on some dry knoll; the whistling of the fallow-deer; or the tiny bark of the prairie marmot. All these were well-known sounds; and as each was uttered, the cibolero stopped and listened attentively.

Under other circumstances, he would not have heeded them, but he knew that these sounds could be imitated, and his ear was bent to detect any counterfeit. He could distinguish the Pāné trail of the previous night. A strong band there must have been, by the numerous tracks on the grass. At the crossing of a stream Carlos could detect the prints of moccasins in the sand. There were still some of the party a-foot then, though, no doubt, the stolen *mulada* had mounted a good many.

Carlos rode on with more caution than ever. He was half-way to the Waco village, and still the Pāné trail led in that direction. Surely these could not have passed without finding it? Such skilled warriors as the Pānés would not. They would see the trail of the Wacoes leading to the cibolero's own camp — they would soon discover the lodges

— perhaps they had already made their attack — perhaps ——

The reflections of the cibolero were suddenly interrupted; distant sounds fell upon his ear — shouts and cries of fearful import — with that continued murmur that results from the mingling of many voices in loud and confused clamour. Now and then was heard a whoop, or a cheer, or a shrill whistle, rising above the ordinary noises, and carrying far over the plain its tones of triumph or revenge.

Carlos knew the import of these shouts and cries — they were the sounds of battle! — of terrible and deadly strife!

They came from behind the hill — the cibolero was just climbing it.

He spurred his horse, and, galloping forward to its crest, looked down into the valley. The conflict was raging before him!

He had a full view of the dreadful scene.

Six hundred dusky horsemen were riding about on the plain; some dashing at each other with couched lances — some twanging their bows from a distance; and others close together in the hand-to-hand combat of the deadly tomahawk! Some were charging in groups with their long spears—some wheeling into flight, and others, dismounted, were battling on foot! Some took shelter among the timber islands, and sprang out again as they saw an opportunity of sending an arrow, or lancing a foeman in the back; and so the red contest continued.

Not a shot was heard—neither bugle nor drum sent forth their inspiring notes; no cannon rolled its thunder—no rocket blazed—no smoke spread its sulphury cloud upon the air — but without these sights and sounds there was no fear of mistaking that contest for a mimic game — a tournament of the prairies.

The wild war-whoop, and the wilder whistle—the earnest onslaught — the fierce charging cheer — the cries of triumph and vengeance — the neighing steeds without riders — here and there the prostrate savage, with skinless scalp, glaring red in the sun—the spears and hatchets crimsoned with blood, — all were evidence of real and deadly strife, and Carlos did not doubt for a moment the character of the scene. Before him was an Indian fight—Waco and Pāné engaged in the earnest struggle of life and death!

All this he comprehended at a glance, and after regarding the fight for a moment, he could distinguish the warriors of both tribes from one another. The Pānés, in full war costume, were easily recognised by their tufted scalp-locks; while the Wacoes, who had, no doubt, been taken by surprise, were many of them in hunting-shirts and leggings. Some, however, were nearly as naked as their

adversaries; but easily distinguished from them by their full flowing hair.

The first impulse of the cibolero was to gallop forward and mingle in the fight,—of course, taking side with the Wacoes. The sound of the conflict roused his blood, and the sight of the robbers who had so lately ruined him rendered him eager for revenge. Many of them were mounted upon the very mules they had taken from him, and Carlos was determined to have some of them back again.

He was about to put spurs to his horse, and dash forward, when a sudden change seemed to occur in the conflict that decided him to remain where he was. The Pānés were giving way!

Many of them were seen wheeling out of the plain, and taking to flight.

As Carlos looked down the hill, he saw three of the Pāné warriors in full run, making

up to the spot where he stood. Most of the band were still fighting, or had fled in a different direction; but these, cut off from the rest, came directly up the hill at a gallop.

The cibolero had drawn his horse under the cover of some trees, and was not perceived by them until they were close to the spot.

At this moment the war-cry of the Wacoes was heard directly in their rear, and Carlos saw that two mounted warriors of that tribe were in pursuit. The fugitives looked back, and seeing only two adversaries after them, once more wheeled round and gave fight.

At their first charge one of the pursuers was killed, and the other—whom Carlos now recognised as the Waco chief — was left alone against three assailants.

The whip-like crack of the cibolero's rifle sounded on the air, and one of the Pānés dropped out of his saddle. The other two,

ignorant of whence the shot had come, continued their onset on the Waco chief, who, dashing close up, split the skull of one of them with his tomahawk. His horse, however, bore him rapidly past, and before he could wheel round, the remaining Pāné—an active warrior —rushed after and thrust his long spear into the back of the chief. Its head passed clear through his body, completely impaling him; and with a death-whoop, the noble Indian fell from his horse to the ground.

But his enemy fell at the same time. The arrow of the cibolero was too late to save, though not to avenge, the Waco's fall. It pierced the Pāné just at the moment the latter had made his thrust, and he fell to the ground simultaneously with his victim, still clutching the handle of the spear!

A fearful group lay dead upon the sward; but Carlos did not stay to contemplate it.

The fight still raged in another part of the field, and, putting spurs to his horse, he galloped off to take part in it.

But the Pānés had now lost many of their best warriors, and a general panic had seized upon them, ending in their full flight. Carlos followed along with the victorious pursuers, now and then using his rifle upon the fleeing robbers. But fearing that a stray party of them might attack his own little camp, he turned from the line of pursuit, and galloped in that direction. On arriving, he found Antonio and the peons fortified within their corral, and all safe. Stray Indians had passed them, but all apparently too much frightened to have any desire for an attack upon the little party.

As soon as the cibolero had ascertained these facts, he turned his horse and rode back toward the scene of the late conflict.

## CHAPTER XVI.

As Carlos approached the spot where the chief had been slain he heard the death-wail chaunted by a chorus of voices.

On getting still nearer, he perceived a ring of warriors dismounted and standing around a corpse. It was that of the fallen chief. Others, fresh from the pursuit, were gathering to the place; each taking up the melancholy dirge as he drew nigh.

The cibolero alighted, and walked forward to the ring. Some regarded him with looks of surprise, while others who knew he had aided them in the fight, stepped up and grasped him by the hand. One old warrior taking Carlos' arm in his, led him forward to the

ring, and silently pointed to the now ghastly features, as though he was imparting to the cibolero the news that their chief was dead!

Neither he nor any of the warriors knew what part Carlos had borne in the affair. No one, now alive, had been witness to the conflict in which the chief had fallen. Around the spot were high copses that hid it from the rest of the field, and, at the time this conflict occurred, the fight was raging in a different direction. The warrior, therefore, thought he was imparting to Carlos a piece of news, and the latter remained silent.

But there was a mystery among the braves, and Carlos saw this by their manner. Five Indians lay dead upon the ground *unscalped!* That was the mystery. They were the three Pānés, and the chief with the other Waco. They could not have slain each other, and all have fallen on the spot. That was not

probable. The Waco and one of the Pānés lay apart. The other three were close together, just as they had fallen, the chief impaled by the Pāné spear, while his slayer lay behind him still grasping the weapon! The red tomahawk was clutched firmly in the hands of the chief, and the cleft skull of the second Pāné showed where it had last fallen.

So far the Indians translated the tableau, but the mystery lay not there. Who had slain the slayer of their chief? That was the puzzle. Some one must have survived this deadly strife, where five warriors had died together!

If a Pāné, surely he would not have gone off without that great trophy which would have rendered him famous for life,—the scalp of the Waco chief? If a Waco, where and who was he?

These questions passed from lip to lip.

No one was found to answer them, but there were yet some warriors to return from the pursuit, and the inquiry was suspended, while the death-song was again chaunted over the fallen chief.

At length all the braves had arrived on the spot, and stood in a circle around the body. One of the warriors stepped forward to the midst, and by a signal intimated that he wished to be heard. A breathless silence followed, and the warrior began:—

"Wacoes! our hearts are sad when they should otherwise rejoice. In the midst of victory a great calamity has fallen upon us. We have lost our father,—our brother! Our great chief — he whom we all loved — has fallen. Alas! In the very hour of triumph, when his strong right hand had hewn down his enemy on the field—in that moment has he fallen!

"The hearts of his warriors are sad, the hearts of his people will long be sad!

"Wacoes! our chief has not fallen unrevenged. His slayer lies at his feet pierced with the deadly dart, and weltering in his blood. Who of you hath done this?"

Here the speaker paused for a moment as if waiting for a reply. None was given.

"Wacoes!" he continued, "our beloved chief has fallen, and our hearts are sad. But it glads them to know that his death has been avenged. There lies his slayer, still wearing his hated scalp. What brave warrior claims the trophy? Let him step forth and take it!"

Here there was another pause, but neither voice nor movement answered the challenge.

The cibolero was silent with the rest. He did not comprehend what was said, as the speech was in the Waco tongue, and he understood it not. He guessed that it related

to the fallen chief and his enemies, but its exact purport was unknown to him.

"Brothers!" again resumed the orator, "brave men are modest and silent about their deeds. None but a brave warrior could have done this. We know that a brave warrior will avow it. Let him fear not to speak. The Wacoes will be grateful to the warrior who has avenged the death of their beloved chief."

Still the silence was unbroken, except by the voice of the orator.

"Brother warriors!" he continued, raising his voice and speaking in an earnest tone, "I have said that the Wacoes will be grateful for this deed. I have a proposal to make. Hear me!"

All signified assent by gestures.

"It is our custom," continued the speaker, "to elect our chief from the braves of our

tribe. I propose that we elect him *now* and *here*—here! on the red field where his predecessor has fallen. *I propose for our chief the warrior who has done this deed!*" And the orator pointed to the fallen Pāné.

"*My* voice for the brave who has avenged our chief!" cried one.

"And mine!" shouted another.

"And mine! and mine! and mine!" exclaimed all the warriors.

"Then solemnly be it proclaimed," said the orator, "that he to whom belongs this trophy," he pointed to the scalp of the Pāné, "shall be chief of the Waco nation!"

"Solemnly we avow it!" cried all the warriors in the ring, each placing his hand over his heart as he spoke.

"Enough!" said the orator. "Who is chief of the Waco warriors? Let him declare himself on the spot!"

A dead silence ensued. Every eye was busy scanning the faces around the circle, every heart was beating to hail their new chief.

Carlos, unconscious of the honour that was in store for him, was standing a little to one side, observing the movements of his dusky companions with interest. He had not the slightest idea of the question that had been put. Some one near him, however, who spoke Spanish, explained to him the subject of the inquiry, and he was about to make a modest avowal, when one of the braves in the circle exclaimed,—

"Why be in doubt longer? If modesty ties the tongue of the warrior, let his weapon speak. Behold! his arrow still pierces the body of our foe. Perhaps it will declare its owner,—it is a marked one!"

"True!" ejaculated the orator. "Let us question the arrow!"

And stepping forward he drew the shaft from the body of the Pāné, and held it aloft.

The moment the eyes of the warriors fell upon its barbed head, an exclamation of astonishment passed from their lips. The head was of *iron!* No Waco ever used such a weapon as that!

All eyes were instantly turned on Carlos the cibolero, with looks of inquiry and admiration. All felt that it must be from his bow had sped that deadly shaft; and they were the more convinced of this because some who had noticed the third Pāné pierced with a rifle bullet, had just declared the fact to the crowd.

Yes, it must be so. The pale-face was the avenger of their chief!

## CHAPTER XVII.

Carlos, who by this time had become aware of the nature of their inquiries, now stepped forward, and in modest phrase detailed through the interpreter how the chief had fallen, and what part he himself had borne in the conflict.

A loud murmur of applause broke from the circle of warriors, and the more excited of the young men rushed forward and grasped the cibolero's hand, uttering as they did so expressions of gratitude. Most of the warriors already knew that to him they were indebted for their safety. It was the report

of his rifle, fired in the night, that had put them on their guard, and prevented the Pānés from surprising their encampment, else the day's history might have been very different. In fact, the Pānés, through this very signal, having been heard, had been themselves surprised, and that was the true secret of their disaster and sanguinary retreat.

When, in addition to this service, it was seen how the cibolero had fought on their side, killing several of their foes, the hearts of the Wacoes were filled with gratitude; but now that it became known that the pale-faced warrior was the avenger of their beloved chief, their gratitude swelled into enthusiasm, and for some minutes their loud expressions of it alone could be heard.

When the excitement had to some extent subsided, the warrior, who seemed to be recognised as the orator of the tribe, and who was

regarded with great deference, again stood forth to speak. This time his speech was directed to Carlos alone.

"White warrior!" he said. "I have spoken with the braves of our nation. They all feel that they owe you deep gratitude, which words cannot repay. The purport of our recent deliberations has been explained to you. Upon this ground we vowed that the avenger of him who lies cold should be our future chief. We thought not at the time that that brave warrior was our white brother. But now we know; and should we for that be false to our vow—to our promised word? No!—not even in thought; and here, with equal solemnity, we again repeat that oath."

"We repeat it!" echoed around the ring of warriors, while each with solemnity of manner placed his hand over his heart.

"White warrior!" continued the speaker,

"our promise remains sacred. The honour we offer you is the greatest that we can bestow. It has never been borne but by a *true* warrior of the Waco tribe, for no impotent descendant of even a favourite chief has ever ruled over the braves of our nation. We do not fear to offer this honour to you. We would rejoice if you would accept it. Stranger! we will be proud of a *white* chief when that chief is a warrior such as you! We know you better than you think. We have heard of you from our allies the Comanche—we have heard of *Carlos the cibolero!*

"We know you are a great warrior; and we know too, that in your own country, among your own people, you are nothing. Excuse our freedom, but speak we not the truth? We despise your people, who are only tyrants and slaves. All these things

have our Comanche brothers told us, and much more of *you*. We know who you are, then; we knew you when you came amongst us, and were glad to see you. We traded with you as a friend.

"We now hail you as a brother and thus say,—If you have no ties that bind you to your ungrateful nation, we can offer you one that will not be ungrateful. Live with us,—be our chief!"

As the speaker ended, his last words were borne like an echo from lip to lip until they had gone round the full circle of warriors, and then a breathless silence ensued.

Carlos was so taken by surprise that for some moments he was unable to make reply. He was not alone surprised by the singular proposal thus singularly made to him; but the knowledge which the speaker betrayed

of his circumstances quite astonished him. True, he had traded much among the Comanches, and was on friendly terms with that tribe, some of whom, in times of peace, even visited the settlement of San Ildefonso; but it seemed odd that these savages should have noticed the fact—for fact it was—that the cibolero was somewhat of an outcast among his own people. Just then he had no time to reflect upon the singularity of the circumstances, as the warriors waited his reply.

He scarcely knew what reply to make. Hopeless outcast that he was, for a moment the proposal seemed worthy of acceptance. At home he was little better than a slave; here he would be ruler, the lord elect of all.

The Wacoes, though savages by name, were warriors, were men of hearts, human

and humane. He had proofs of it before him. His mother and sister would share his destiny; but Catalina,—ha! that one thought resolved him; he reflected no further.

"Generous warriors!" he replied; "I feel from the bottom of my heart a full sense of the honour you have offered to confer upon me. I wish that by words I could prove how much I thank you, but I cannot. My words, therefore, shall be few and frank. It is true that in my own land I am not honoured,—I am one of the poorest of its people; but there *is a tie* that binds me to it:—*a tie of the heart* that calls upon me to return. Wacoes, I have spoken!"

"Enough!" said the orator; "enough, brave stranger, it is not for us to inquire into the motives that guide your acts. If not our chief, you will remain our friend. We have yet a way—a poor one—left us

to show our gratitude: you have suffered from our enemies, you have lost your property, but that has been recovered, and shall be yours again. Further, we entreat you to remain with us for some days, and partake of our rude hospitality. You will stay with us?"

The invitation was promptly echoed by all, and as promptly accepted.

* * * * *

About a week after this time an atajo of pack-mules—nearly fifty in number—loaded with buffalo-hides and tasajo, was seen struggling up the eastern ceja of the Llano Estacado, and heading in a north-westerly direction over that desert plain. The arriero, mounted upon the *mulera*, was a half-blood Indian. Three carretas, drawn by oxen and driven by dusky peons, followed the mule-train, making noise enough to

frighten even the coyotés that behind skulked through the coverts of mezquite. A dashing horseman mounted upon a fine black steed rode in advance, who, ever and anon turning in his saddle, looked back with a satisfied glance upon the fine atajo. That horseman was *Carlos*.

The Wacoes had not forgotten to be generous. That train of mules and those heavy packs were the gift of the tribe to the avenger of their chief. But that was not all. In the breast-pocket of the cibolero's jacket, was a "bolsa," filled with rare stuff, also a present from the Wacoes, who promised some day that their guest should have more of the same. What did that bolsa contain? coin? money? jewels? No. It contained only dust; but that dust was yellow and glittering. It was *gold!*

## CHAPTER XVIII.

On the second day after the fiesta there was a small dining party at the Presidio. Merely a few bachelor friends of the Commandante — the *beaux esprits* of the place—including the fashionable Echevarria. The cura was among the number, and also the mission padrés, both of whom enjoyed the convivialities of the table equal to any "friar of orders grey."

The company had gone through the numerous courses of a Mexican meal — the "pucheros," "guisados," and endless mixtures of "chilé,"—and the dinner was at that stage, when the cloth has been carried off, and the wine flows freely. "Canario," and "Xeres,"

"Pedro de Ximenes," "Madeira," and "Bordeos," in bottles of different shapes, stood upon the table; and for those who liked a stronger beverage there was a flask of golden "Catalan," with another of Maraschino. A well-stored cellar was that of the Commandante. In addition to his being military governor, he was, as already hinted, collector of the *derechos de consume*, or custom-house dues. Hence he was the recipient of many a little present, as now and then a basket of champagne or a dozen of Bordeaux.

His company had got fairly into the wine. The cura had thrown aside his sanctity and become human like the rest; the padrés had forgotten their sackcloth and bead-roll, and the senior of them, Padre Joaquin, entertained the table with spicy adventures which had occurred to him *before* he became a monk. Echevarria related anecdotes of Paris, with

many adventures he had encountered among the grisettes.

The Spanish officers being the hosts were, of course, least talkative, though the Commandante—vain as any young sub who wore his epaulettes for the first time—could not refrain from alluding occasionally to his terrible list of *bonnes fortunes* among the fair Sevillanas. He had long been stationed at the city of oranges, and "la gracia Andalusiana" was ever his theme of admiration.

Roblado believed in the belles of the Havannah, and descanted upon the plump, material beauty which is characteristic of the Quadroons; while the lieutenant expressed his *penchant* for the small-footed *Guadalaxareñas* —not of old Spain, but of the rich Mexican province Guadalaxara. *He* had been quartered there.

So ran the talk—rough and ribald—upon

that delicate theme—woman. The presence of the trio of churchmen was no restraint. On the contrary, both padrés and cura boasted of their *liaisons* with as much bawd and brass as the others, for padrés and cura were both as depraved as any of their dining companions. Any little reserve, either might have shown upon ordinary occasions, had disappeared after a few cups of wine; and none of them feared the company, which, on its part, stood as little in awe of them. The affectation of sanctity and self-denial was meant only for the simple poblanos and the simpler peons of the settlement. At the dinner-table it was occasionally assumed by one or the other, but only by way of joke,—to give point and piquancy to the relation of some adventure. In the midst of the conversation, which had grown somewhat general and confused, a name was pronounced which produced a mo-

mentary silence. That name was "Carlos the cibolero."

At the mention of this name several countenances changed expression. Roblado was seen to frown. On Vizcarra's face were portrayed mixed emotions, and both padrés and cura seemed to know the name unfavourably.

It was the beau Echevarria who had mentioned it.

"'Pon the honour of a cavallero! the most impudent thing I ever witnessed in all my life, even in republican Paris! A fellow,—a demned trader in hides and tasajo — in short, a butcher of demned buffaloes to aspire —— *Parbleu!*"

Echevarria, though talking Spanish, always swore in French. It was more polite.

"Most insolent—intolerable!" cried several voices.

"I don't think the lady seemed over angry withal," remarked a blunt young fellow, who sat near the lower end of the table.

A chorus of voices expressed dissent from this opinion. Roblado's was the loudest.

"Don Ramon Diaz," said he, addressing himself to the young fellow, "you certainly could not have observed very carefully on that occasion. I who was beside the lady know that she was filled with disgust ——" (this was a lie, and Roblado knew it,) "and her father ——"

"Oh, her *father*, yes!" cried Don Ramon, laughing. "Any one could see that *he* was angry — that was natural enough. Ha! ha!"

"But who is the fellow?" inquired one.

"A splendid rider," replied Don Ramon. "The Commandante will admit that," and the free speaker looked at Vizcarra with a smile of

intelligence. The latter frowned at the observation.

"You lost a good sum, did you not?" inquired the cura of Vizcarra.

"Not to him," replied the Commandante, "but to that vulgar fellow who seems his friend. The worst of it is, when one bets with these low people there is no chance of getting a *revanche* at some other time. One cannot meet them in the ordinary way."

"But who is the fellow?" again inquired one.

"Who? Why a cibolero—that's all."

"True, but is there nothing about his history? He's a *güero*, and that is odd for a native! Is he a Criollo? He might be a Biscayan."

"Neither one nor the other. 'Tis said he's an Americano."

"Americano!"

"Not exactly that—his father was; but the padré here can tell all about him."

The priest thus appealed to entertained the company with some facts in the history of the cibolero. His father had been an Americano, as it was supposed—some stray personage who had mysteriously found his way to the valley and settled in it long ago. Such instances were rare in the settlements of New Mexico; but what was rarer still, in this case the "Americano" was accompanied by an "Americana"—the mother of Carlos—and the same old woman who attracted so much attention on the day of San Juan. All the efforts of the padrés to christianize either one or the other had been in vain. The old trapper—for such he was—died as he had lived—a blaspheming "heretico;" and there was a general belief in the settlement that his widow held converse with the devil. All this was a scandal to the Church, and the

padrés would long since have expelled the güero family, but that, for some reason or other, they were protected by the old Commandante —Vizcarra's predecessor—who had restrained the zealous priests in their good intention.

"But, caballeros!" said the padré, glancing towards Vizcarra, "such heretics are dangerous citizens. In them lie the seeds of revolution and social disturbance; and when this güero is at home, he is seen only in the company of those we cannot watch too closely: he has been seen with some of the suspected Tagnos, several of whom are in his service."

"Ha! with them, indeed!" exclaimed several. "A dangerous fellow!—he should be looked after."

The sister of the cibolero now became the subject of conversation, and as remarks were made more or less complimentary to her beauty, the expression upon the face of Viz-

carra kept constantly changing. That villain was more interested in the conversation than his guests were aware, and he had already formed his plans. Already his agents were out on the accomplishment of his atrocious designs.

The transition from the cibolero's sister to the other belles of the place, and to the subject of woman in general, was natural; and the company were soon engaged in their original conversation, which, under the influence of additional wine, grew more "racy" than ever.

The scene ended by several of the party becoming "boracho;" and the night being now far advanced, the guests took their leave, some of them requiring to be conducted to their homes. A soldier apiece accompanied the cura and padrés, all three of whom were as "drunk as lords;" and it was no new thing for them.

## CHAPTER XIX.

The Commandante, with his friend Roblado, alone remained in the room, and continued the conversation with a fresh glass and cigar.

"And you really think, Roblado, that the fellow had encouragement. I think so too, else he would never have dared to act as he did."

"I am quite sure of it now. That he saw her last night, and alone, I am certain. As I approached the house, I saw a man standing before the reja, and leaning against the bars, as if conversing with some one inside. Some friend of Don Ambrosio, thought I.

"As I drew nearer, the man, who was muffled in a manga, walked off and leaped

upon a horse. Judge my surprise on recognising in the horse the black stallion that was yesterday ridden by the cibolero!

"When I entered the house and made inquiries as to who were at home, the servants informed me that master was at the *mineria*, and that the Señorita had retired, and could see no one that night!

"By heaven! I was in such a passion, I hardly knew what I said at the moment. The thing's scarce credible; but, that this low fellow is on secret terms with her, is as sure as I am a soldier."

"It does seem incredible. What do you mean to do, Roblado?"

"Oh! I'm safe enough about her. She shall be better watched for the future. I've had a hint given to Don Ambrosio. You know my secret well enough, colonel. Her *mine is my loadstone;* but it is a cursed

queer thing to have for one's rival such a fellow as this! Ha! ha! ha!"

Roblado's laugh was faint and unreal. "Do you know," continued he, striking on a new idea, "the padré don't like the güero family. That's evident from the hints he let drop to-night. We may get this fellow out of the way without much scandal, if the Church will only interfere. The padrés can expel him at once from the settlement if they can only satisfy themselves that he is a 'heretico.' Is it not so?"

"It is," coldly replied Vizcarra, sipping his wine; "but to expel *him*, my dear Roblado, *some one else* might be also driven off. The rose would be plucked along with the thorn. You understand?"

"Perfectly."

"That, then, of course, *I* don't wish—at least not for the present. After some time

we may be satisfied to part with rose, thorn, bush, roots, and all. Ha! ha! ha!"

"By the way, colonel!" asked the captain, "have you made any progress yet?—have you been to the house?"

"No, my dear fellow; I have not had time. It's some distance, remember. Besides I intend to defer my visit until this fellow is out of the way. It will be more convenient to carry on my courtship in his absence."

"Out of the way! what do you mean?"

"That the cibolero will shortly start for the Plains—to be gone, perhaps for several months, cutting up buffalo beef, tricking the Indians, and such like employments."

"Ho! that's not so bad."

"So you see, querido camarado, there's no need for violence in the matter. Have patience—time enough for everything. Be-

fore my bold buffalo-hunter gets back, both our little affairs will be settled, I trust. You shall be the owner of rich mines, and I ——"

A slight knock at the door, and the voice of Sergeant Gomez was heard, asking to see the Commandante.

"Come in, sergeant!" shouted the colonel. The brutal-looking trooper walked into the room, and, from his appearance, it was plain he had just dismounted from a ride.

"Well, sergeant?" said Vizcarra, as the man drew near; "speak out! Captain Roblado may know what you have to say."

"The party, colonel, lives in the very last house down the valley,—full ten miles from here. There are but the three, mother, sister, and brother—the same you saw at the fiesta. There are three or four Tagno servants, who help the man in his business. He owns a few mules, oxen, and carts, that's all. These

he makes use of in his expeditions, upon one of which he is about to start in three or four days at the furthest. It is to be a long one, I heard, as he is to take a new route over the Llano Estacado."

"Over the Llano Estacado?"

"Such, I was told, was his intention."

"Anything else to say, sergeant?"

"Nothing, colonel, except that the girl has a sweetheart—the same young fellow who bet so heavily against you at the fiesta."

"The devil!" exclaimed Vizcarra, while a deep shadow crossed his forehead.

"He, indeed! I suspected that. Where does he live?"

"Not far above them, colonel. He is the owner of a rancho, and is reputed rich—that is for a ranchero."

"Help yourself to a glass of Catalan, sergeant."

The trooper stretched out his hand, laid hold of a bottle, and, having filled one of the glasses, bowed respectfully to the officers, and drank off the brandy at a draught. Seeing that he was not wanted further, he touched his shako and withdrew.

"So, camarado, you see it is right enough, so far as you are concerned."

"And for you also!" replied Roblado.

"Not exactly."

"Why not?"

"I don't like the story of this sweetheart — this ranchero. The fellow possesses money — a spirit, too, that may be troublesome. He's not the man one would be called upon to fight — at least not one in my position; but *he* is one of these people — what the cibolero is not — and has their sympathies with him. It would be a very different thing to get involved with him in

an affair. Bah! what need I care? I never yet failed. Good night, camarado!"

"*Bueños noches!*" replied Roblado; and both rising simultaneously from the table, retired to their respective sleeping-rooms.

## CHAPTER XX.

The "ranchos" and "haciendas" of the valley extended nearly ten miles along the stream below San Ildefonso. Near the town they were studded more thickly; but, as you descended the stream, fewer were met with, and these of a poorer class. The fear of the "Indios bravos" prevented those who were well off from building their establishments at any great distance from the Presidio. Poverty, however, induced others to risk themselves nearer the frontier; and, as for several years the settlement had not been disturbed, a number of small farmers and graziers had established themselves as far as eight or ten miles distance below the town.

Half-a-mile beyond all these stood an isolated dwelling—the last to be seen in going down the valley. It seemed beyond the pale of protection—so far as the garrison was concerned—for no patrol ever extended its rounds to so distant a point. Its owner evidently trusted to fate, or to the clemency of the Apaches—the Indians who usually troubled the settlement,—for the house in question was in no other way fortified against them. Perhaps its obscure and retired situation contributed to its security.

It stood somewhat off the road, not near the stream, but back under the shadow of the bluff; in fact, almost built against the cliff.

It was but a poor rancho, like all the others in the valley, and, indeed throughout most parts of Mexico, built of large blocks of mud, squared in a mould and sun-dried. Many of the better class of such buildings showed

white fronts, because near at hand gypsum was to be had for the digging. Some of greater pretension had windows, that looked as though they were glazed. So they were, but not with glass. The shining plates that resembled it were but *laminæ* of the aforesaid gypsum, which is used for that purpose in several districts of New Mexico.

The rancho in question was ornamented neither with wash nor windows. It stood under the cliff, its brown mud walls scarce contrasting with the colour of the rock; and, instead of windows, a pair of dark holes, with a few wooden bars across them, gave light to the interior.

This light, however, was only a supplement to that which entered by the door, habitually kept open.

The front of the house was hardly visible

from the valley road. A traveller would never have noticed it, and even the keen eye of an Indian might have failed to discover it. The singular fence that surrounded it hid it from view,—singular to the eye of one unaccustomed to the vegetation of this far land. It was a fence of columnar cacti. The plants that formed it were regular fluted columns, six inches thick and from six to ten feet high. They stood side by side like pickets in a stockade, so close together that the eye could scarce see through the interstices, still further closed by the thick beard of thorns. Near their tops in the season these vegetable columns became loaded with beautiful wax-like flowers, which disappeared only to give way to bright and luscious fruits. It was only after passing through the opening in this fence that the little rancho could be seen; and although its walls were rude, the sweet little

flower-garden, that bloomed within the enclosure, told that the hand of care was not absent.

Beyond the cactus-fence, and built against the cliff, was another enclosure—a mere wall of *adobe* of no great height. This was a "corral" where cattle were kept, and at one corner was a sort of shed or stable of small dimensions. Sometimes half-a-dozen mules and double the number of oxen might be seen in that corral, and in the stable as fine a horse as ever carried saddle. Both were empty now, for the animals that usually occupied them were out. Horse, mules, and oxen, as well as their owner, were far away upon the prairies.

Their owner was Carlos the cibolero. Such was the home of the buffalo-hunter, the home of his aged mother and fair sister. Such had been their home since Carlos was a child.

And yet they were not of the people of the valley nor the town. Neither race — Spanish nor Indian — claimed them. They differed from both as widely as either did from the other. It was true what the padré had said. True that they were Americans; that their father and mother had settled in the valley a long time ago; that no one knew whence they had come, except that they had crossed the great plains from the eastward; that they were *hereticos*, and that the padrés could never succeed in bringing them into the fold of the Church; that these would have expelled, or otherwise punished them, but for the interference of the military Commandante; and, furthermore, that both were always regarded by the common people of the settlement with a feeling of superstitious dread. Latterly this feeling, concentrated on the mother of Carlos, had taken a new shape, and

they looked upon her as a *hechicera*,—a witch —and crossed themselves devoutly whenever she met them. This was not often, for it was rare that she made her appearance among the inhabitants of the valley. Her presence at the fiesta of San Juan was the act of Carlos, who had been desirous of giving a day's amusement to the mother and sister he so much loved.

Their American origin had much to do with the isolation in which they lived. Since a period, long preceding that time, bitter jealousy existed between the Spano-Mexican and Anglo-American races. This feeling had been planted by national authority, and nursed and fomented by priestcraft. Events that have since taken place had already cast their shadows over the Mexican frontier; and Florida and Louisiana were regarded as but steps in the ladder of American aggrandisement. A full understanding of these matters

was of course confined to the more intelligent; but all were imbued with the bad passions of international hate.

The family of the cibolero suffered under the common prejudice, and on that account lived almost wholly apart from the inhabitants of the valley. What intercourse they had was mostly with the native Indian population—the poor Tagnos, who felt but little of this anti-American feeling.

If we enter the rancho of Carlos we shall see the fair-haired Rosita seated upon a *petaté*, and engaged in weaving rebosos. The piece of mechanism which serves her for a loom consists of only a few pieces of wood rudely carved. So simple is it that it is hardly just to call it a machine. Yet those long bluish threads stretched in parallel lines, and vibrating to the touch of her nimble fingers, will soon be woven into a beautiful

scarf to cover the head of some coquettish poblana of the town. None in the valley can produce such rebosos as the cibolero's sister. So much as he can beat all the youth in feats of horsemanship, so much does she excel in the useful art which is her source of subsistence.

There are but two rooms in the rancho, and that is one more than will be found in most of its fellows. But the delicate sentiment still exists in the Saxon mind. The family of the cibolero are not yet Indianised.

The kitchen is the larger apartment and the more cheerful, because lighted by the open door. In it you will see a small "brazero" or altar-like fire-place—half-a-dozen earthen "ollas" shaped like urns—some gourd shell-cups and bowls—a tortilla stone, with its short legs and inclined surface—some *petatés* to sit upon—some buffalo-robes, for a

similar purpose — a bag of maize — some bunches of dried herbs, and strings of red and green chilé — but no pictures of saints; and, perhaps, it is the only house in the whole valley where your eye will *not* be gratified by a sight of these. Truly the family of the cibolero are "hereticos."

Not last you will see an old woman seated near the fire, and smoking *punche* in a pipe! A strange old woman is she, and strange no doubt her history; but that is revealed to no one. Her sharp, lank features; her blanched, yet still luxuriant hair; the wild gleam of her eyes; all render her appearance singular. Others than the ignorant could not fail to fancy her a being different from the common order. No wonder, then, that these regard her as "un hechicera!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

Rosita knelt upon the floor passing her little hand-shuttle through the cotton-woof. Now she sang—and sweetly she sang—some merry air of the American back-woods that had been taught her by her mother; anon some romantic lay of Old Spain—the "Troubadour" perhaps—a fine piece of music, that gives such happy expression to the modern song "Love Not." This "Troubadour" was a favourite with Rosita; and when she took up her bandolon, and accompanied herself with its guitar-like notes, the listener would be delighted.

She was now singing to beguile the hours

and lighten her task; and although not accompanied by any music, her silvery voice sounded sweet and clear.

The mother had laid aside her pipe of *punche*, and was busy as Rosita herself. She spun the threads with which the rebosos were woven. If the loom was a simple piece of mechanism, much more so was the spinning-machine—the "huso" or "malacate"—which was nothing more or less than the "whirligig spindle." Yet with this primitive apparatus did the old dame draw out and twist as smooth a thread as ever issued from the "jenny."

"Poor dear Carlos! One, two, three, four, five, six—six notches I have made—he is just in his sixth day. By this time he will be over the Llano, mother. I hope he will have good luck, and get well treated of the Indians."

"Never fear, niña—my brave boy has his father's rifle, and knows how to use it—well he does. Never fear for Carlos!"

"But then, mother, he goes in a new direction! What if he fall in with a hostile tribe?"

"Never fear, niña! Worse enemies than Indians has Carlos—worse enemies nearer home—cowardly slaves! they hate us—both *Gachupinos* and *Criollos* hate us—Spanish dogs! they hate our Saxon blood!"

"Oh mother, say not so! They are not *all* our enemies. We have some friends?"

Rosita was thinking of Don Juan.

"Few—few—and far between! What care I while my brave son is there? He is friend enough for us. Soft heart—brave heart—strong arm—who like my Carlos? And the boy loves his old mother—his strange old mother, as these *pelados* think

her. He still loves his old mother. Ha! ha! ha! What, then, cares she for friends? Ha! ha! ha!"

Her speech ended in a laugh of triumph, showing how much she exulted in the possession of such a son.

"O my! what a *carga*, mother! He never had such a carga before! I wonder where Carlos got all the money?"

Rosita did not know exactly where; but she had some fond suspicions as to who had stood her brother's friend.

"*Ay de mi!*" she continued; "he will be very rich if he gets a good market for all those fine things — he will bring back troops of mules. How I shall long for his return! One — two — three — six — yes, there are but six notches in the wood. Oh! I wish it full along both edges—I do!"

Rosita's eyes, as she said this, were bent

upon a thin piece of cedar-wood that hung against the wall, and upon which six little notches were observable. That was her clock and calendar, which was to receive a fresh mark each day until the cibolero's return—thus keeping her informed of the exact time that had elapsed since his departure.

After gazing at the cedar-wood for a minute or two, and trying to make the six notches count seven, she gave it up, and went on with her weaving.

The old woman, laying down her spindle, raised the lid of an earthen "olla" that stood over a little fire upon the brazero. From the pot proceeded a savoury steam; for it contained a stew of *tasajo* cut into small pieces, and highly seasoned with *cebollas* (Spanish onions) and *chilé colorado* (red capsicum).

"Niña, the *guisado* is cooked," said she, after lifting a portion of the stew on a

wooden spoon, and examining it; "let us to dinner!"

"Very well, mother," replied Rosita, rising from her loom; "I shall make the tortillas at once."

Tortillas are only eaten warm—that is, are fit only for eating when warm—or fresh from the "*comal*." They are, therefore, to be baked immediately before the meal commences, or during its continuance.

Rosita set the olla on one side, and placed the comal over the coals. Another olla, which contained maize—already boiled soft—was brought forward, and placed beside the "metate," or tortilla-stone; and then, by the help of an oblong roller—also of stone—a portion of the boiled maize was soon reduced to snow-white paste. The metate and roller were now laid aside; and the pretty, rose-coloured fingers of Rosita were thrust into the

paste. The proper quantity for a "tortilla" was taken up, first formed into a round ball, and then clapped out between the palms until it was only a wafer's thickness. Nothing remained but to fling it on the hot surface of the comal, let it lie but for an instant, then turn it, and in a moment more it was ready for eating.

These operations, which required no ordinary adroitness, were performed by Rosita with a skill that showed she was a practised "tortillera."

When a sufficient number were piled upon the plate, Rosita desisted from her labour; and her mother, having already "dished" the guisado, both commenced their repast, eating without knife, fork, or spoon. The tortillas being still warm, and therefore capable of being twisted into any form, served as a substitute for all these contrivances of civilisation;

which in a Mexican rancho are considered superfluous things.

* * * * *

Their simple meal was hardly over when a very unusual sound fell upon their ears.

"Ho! what's that?" cried Rosita, starting to her feet, and listening.

The sound a second time came pealing through the open door and windows.

"I declare it's a bugle!" said the girl. "There must be soldiers."

She ran first to the door, and then up to the cactus-fence. She peered through the interstices of the green columns.

Sure enough there were soldiers. A troop of lancers was marching by twos down the valley, and not far off. Their glittering armour, and the pennons of their lances, gave them a gay and attractive appearance. As Rosita's eyes fell upon them they were

wheeling into line, halting as they finished the movement, with their front to the rancho, and not a hundred paces from the fence! The house was evidently the object of their coming to a halt.

What could soldiers want there? This was Rosita's first reflection. A troop often passed up and down the valley, but never came near the rancho, which, as already stated, was far from the main road. What business could the soldiers be upon, to lead them out of their usual track?

Rosita asked herself these questions; then ran into the house and asked her mother. Neither could answer them; and the girl turned to the fence, and again looked through.

As she did so, she saw one of the soldiers —from his finer dress evidently an officer— separate from the rest, and come galloping towards the house. In a few moments he

drew near, and, reining his horse close up to the fence, looked over the tops of the cactus plants.

Rosita could just see his plumed hat, and below it his face, but she knew the face at once. It was that of the officer who on the day of San Juan had ogled her so rudely. She knew he was the Commandante Vizcarra.

## CHAPTER XXII.

The officer, from his position, had a full view of the girl as she stood in the little enclosure of flowers. She had retreated to the door, and would have gone inside, but she turned to call off Cibolo, a large wolf-dog, who was barking fiercely, and threatening the new-comer.

The dog, obedient to her voice, ran back into the house growling, but by no means satisfied. He evidently wanted to try his teeth on the shanks of the stranger's horse.

"Thank you, fair Señorita," said the officer. "It is very kind of you to protect me from that fierce brute. I would he were

the only danger I had to fear in this house."

"What have you to fear, Señor?" inquired Rosita, with some surprise.

"*Your eyes*, sweet girl: more dangerous than the sharp teeth of your dog,—they have already wounded me."

"Cavallero," replied Rosita, blushing and averting her face, "you have not come here to jest with a poor girl. May I inquire what is your business?"

"Business I have none, lovely Rosita, but to see *you*,—nay, do not leave me!—I *have* business—that is, I am thirsty, and halted for a drink: you will not refuse me a cup of water, fair Señorita?"

These last phrases, broken and hastily delivered, were meant to restrain the girl from cutting short the interview, which she was about to do by entering the house. Vizcarra

was not thirsty, neither did he wish for water; but the laws of hospitality would compel the girl to bring it, and the act might further his purposes.

She, without replying to his complimentary harangue, stepped into the house, and presently returned with a gourd-shell filled with water. Carrying it to the gate-like opening of the fences, she presented it to him, and stood waiting for the vessel.

Vizcarra, to make his request look natural, forced down several gulps of the fluid, and then throwing away the rest, held out the gourd. The girl stretched forth her hand to receive it, but he still held it fast, gazing intently and rudely upon her.

"Lovely Señorita," he said, "may I not kiss that pretty hand that has been so kind to me?"

"Sir! please return me the cup."

"Nay, not till I have paid for my drink. You will accept this?"

He dropped a gold onza into the gourd.

"No, Señor, I cannot accept payment for what is only an act of duty. I shall not take your gold," she added, firmly.

"Lovely Rosita! you have already taken my heart, why not this?"

"I do not understand you, Señor; please put back your money, and let me have the cup."

"I shall not deliver it up, unless you take it with its contents."

"Then you must keep it, Señor," replied she, turning away. "I must to my work."

"Nay, further, Señorita!" cried Vizcarra; "I have another favour to ask,—a light for my cigar? Here, take the cup! See! the coin is no longer in it! You will pardon me for having offered it?"

Vizcarra saw that she was offended, and by this apology endeavoured to appease her.

She received the gourd-shell from his hands, and then went back to the house to bring him the light he had asked for.

Presently she reappeared with some red coals upon a small "brazero."

On reaching the gate she was surprised to see that the officer had dismounted, and was fastening his horse to a stake.

As she offered him the brazero, he remarked, "I am wearied with my ride; may I beg, Señorita, you will allow me a few minutes' shelter from the hot sun?"

Though annoyed at this request, the girl could only reply in the affirmative; and the next moment, with clattering spur and clanking sabre, the Commandante walked into the rancho.

Rosita followed him in without a word,

and without a word he was received by her mother, who, seated in the corner, took no notice of his entrance, not even by looking up at him. The dog made a circuit around him, growling angrily; but his young mistress chided him off; and the brute once more couched himself upon a petaté, and lay with eyes gleaming fiercely at the intruder.

Once in the house, Vizcarra did not feel easy. He saw he was not welcome. Not a word of welcome had been uttered by Rosita, and not a sign of it offered either by the old woman or the dog. The contrary symptoms were unmistakeable, and the grand officer felt he was an intruder.

But Vizcarra was not accustomed to care much for the feelings of people like these. He paid but little regard to their likes or dislikes, especially where these interfered with his pleasures; and, after lighting his cigar,

he sat down on a "banqueta," with as much nonchalance as if he were in his own quarters. He smoked some time without breaking silence.

Meanwhile Rosita had drawn out her loom, and, kneeling down in front of it, went on with her work as if no stranger were present.

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the officer, feigning interest in the process, "how very ingenious! I have often wished to see this! a reboso it is? Upon my word! and that is how they are woven? Can you finish one in a day, Señorita?"

"*Si, Señor,*" was the curt reply.

"And this thread, it is cotton; is it not?"

"Si, Señor."

"It is very prettily arranged, indeed. Did you place it so yourself?"

"Si, Señor."

"Really it requires skill! I should like much to learn how the threads are passed."

And as he said this he left his seat upon the banqueta, and approaching the loom, knelt down beside it.

"Indeed, very singular and ingenious. Ah, now, do you think, pretty Rosita, you could teach me?"

The old woman, who was seated with her eyes bent upon the ground, started at hearing the stranger pronounce her daughter's name, and glanced around at him.

"I am really serious," continued he; "do you think you could teach me this useful art?"

"No, Señor!" was the laconic reply.

"Oh! surely I am not so stupid! I think I could learn it—it seems only to hold this thing so;" here he bent forward, and placed his hand upon the shuttle, so as to touch

the fingers of the girl, "and then put it between the threads in this manner; is it not ——?"

At this moment, as if carried away by his wild passions, he seemed to forget himself; and, turning his eyes upon the blushing girl, he continued in an under tone, "Sweetest Rosita! I love you,—one kiss,—fairest, one kiss!" and before she could escape from his arms, which had already encircled her, he had imprinted a kiss upon her lips!

A scream escaped from the girl, but another, louder and wilder, answered it from the corner. The old woman sprang up from her crouching position, and running across the floor launched herself like a tigress upon the officer! Her long bony fingers flew out, and in an instant were clutching his throat!

"Off! beldame! off!" cried he, struggling

to escape: "off! I say; or my sword shall cut short your wretched life,—off!—off!—I say!"

Still the old woman clutched and screamed, tearing wildly at his throat, his epaulettes, or whatever she could lay hold of.

But sharper than her nails were the teeth of the great wolf-dog, that sprang almost simultaneously from his lair, and seizing the soldier by the limbs, caused him to bellow out at the top of his voice,—

"Without there! Sergeant Gomez! Ho! treason! to the rescue! to the rescue!"

"Ay! dog of a Gachupino!" screamed the old woman,—"dog of Spanish blood! you may call your cowardly myrmidons! Oh! that my brave son were here, or my husband alive! If they were, you would not carry a drop of your villain blood beyond the threshold you have insulted! Go!—go

to your poblanas—your *margaritas!* Go—begone!"

"Hell and furies! This dog, take him off! Ho, there! Gomez! your pistols. Here! send a bullet through him! Haste! haste!"

And battling with his sabre, the valiant Commandante at length effected a retreat to his horse.

He was already well torn about the legs, but, covered by the sergeant, he succeeded in getting into the saddle.

The latter fired off both his pistols at the dog, but the bullets did not take effect; and the animal, perceiving that his enemies outnumbered him, turned and ran back into the house.

The dog was now silent, but the Commandante, as he sat in his saddle, heard a derisive laugh within the rancho. In the clear soft tones of that jeering laughter he

distinguished the voice of the beautiful güera!

Chagrined beyond measure, he would have besieged the rancho with his troop, and insisted on killing the dog; had he not feared that the cause of his ungraceful retreat might become known to his followers. That would be a mortification he did not desire to experience.

He returned, therefore, to the troop, gave the word to march, and the cavalcade moved off, taking the backward road to the town.

After riding at the head of his men for a short while, Vizcarra—whose heart was filled with anger and mortification—gave some orders to the sergeant, and then rode off in advance, and in full gallop.

The sight of a horseman in blue manga, passing in the direction of the rancho—and whom he recognised as the young ranchero,

Don Juan—did not do much towards soothing his angry spirit. He neither halted nor spoke, but, casting on the latter a malignant glance, kept on.

He did not slacken his pace until he drew bridle in the saguan of the Presidio.

His panting horse had to pay for the bitter reflections that tortured the soul of his master.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

The first thing which Rosita did, after the noise without had ceased, was to glide forth and peep through the cactus-fence. She had heard the bugle again, and she wished to be sure that the intruders were gone.

To her joy, she beheld the troop some distance off, defiling up the valley.

She ran back into the house and communicated the intelligence to her mother, who had again seated herself, and was quietly smoking her pipe of *punche*.

"Dastardly ruffians!" exclaimed the latter. "I knew they would be gone. Even an old woman and a dog are enough.

Oh, that my brave Carlos had been here! He would have taught that proud Gachupino we were not so helpless! Ha! that would Carlos!"

"Do not think of it any more, dear mother; I don't think they will return. You have frightened them away,—you and our brave Cibolo. How well he behaved! But I must see," she added, hastily casting her eyes round the room; "he may be hurt. Cibolo! Cibolo! here, good fellow! Come, I've got something for you. Ho, brave dog!"

At the call of her well-known voice, the dog came forth from his hiding-place, and bounded up, wagging his tail, and glancing kindly in her face.

The girl stooped down, and, passing her hands through his shaggy coat, examined every part of his body and limbs, in fear

all the while of meeting with the red stain of a bullet. Fortunately the sergeant's aim had not been true. Neither wound nor scratch had Cibolo received; and as he sprang around his young mistress, he appeared in perfect health and spirits.

A splendid animal he was,—one of those magnificent sheep-dogs of New Mexico,—who, though half-wolf themselves, will successfully defend a flock of sheep from the attack of wolves, or even of the more savage bear. The finest sheep-dogs in the world are they, and one of the finest of his race was Cibolo.

His mistress, having ascertained that he was uninjured, stepped upon the banqueta, and reached up towards a singular-looking object that hung over a peg in the wall. The object bore some resemblance to a string of ill-formed sausages. But it was not that, though it was something quite as good for

Cibolo, who, by his sparkling eyes and short pleased whimpers, showed that he knew what it was. Yes, Cibolo had not to be initiated into the mysteries of a string of tasajo. Dried buffalo-meat was an old and tried favourite; and the moment it reached his jaws, which it did immediately after, he gave proof of this by the earnest manner in which he set to work upon it.

The pretty Rosita, still a little apprehensive, once more peeped through the cactus-fence to assure herself that no one was near.

But this time some one *was* near, and the sight did not cause her any fear,—quite the contrary. The approach of a young man in a blue manga, mounted upon a richly-caparisoned horse, had a contrary effect altogether, and Rosita's little heart now beat with confidence.

This young horseman was Don Juan the

ranchero. He rode straight up to the opening, and seeing the güera cried out in a frank friendly voice, "*Buenos dias, Rosita!*"

The reply was as frank and friendly—a simple return of the salutation,—

"*Buenos dias, Don Juan!*"

"How is the Señora your mother to-day?"

"*Muchas gracias*, Don Juan! as usual she is. Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!"

"*Hola!*" exclaimed Don Juan. "What are you laughing at, Rosita?"

"Ha! ha! ha! Saw you nothing of the fine soldiers?"

"True, I did. I met the troop as I came down, going up the valley in a gallop, and the Commandante riding far ahead, as if the Apaches were after him. In truth, I thought they had met the Indios bravos—for I know

that to be their usual style of riding after an interview with these gentry."

"Ha! ha! ha!" still laughed the little blonde; "but did you notice nothing odd about the officer?"

"I think I did. He looked as though he had ridden through the chapparal; but I had scarce a glance at him, he passed so quickly. He gave *me* one, that was anything but friendly. No doubt he remembers the loss of his gold onzas at San Juan. Ha! ha! But, dear Rosita, what may you be laughing at? Have the soldiers been here? Anything happened?"

Rosita now gave an account of the Commandante's visit; how he had called to light his cigar and get a drink of water; how he had entered the house and been attacked by Cibolo, which caused the precipitate retreat

to his horse, and his hasty departure from the place. She was silent, however, about the most important particulars. She said nothing of the insulting speeches which Vizcarra had made—nothing of the kiss. She feared the effect of such a communication on Don Juan. She knew her lover was of a hot rash disposition. He would not hear these things quietly; he would involve himself in some trouble on her account; and these considerations prompted her to conceal the cause that had led to the "scene." She, therefore, disclosed only the more ludicrous effects, at which she laughed heartily.

Don Juan, even knowing only so much, was inclined to regard the affair more seriously. A visit from Vizcarra—a drink of water—light his cigar—enter the rancho—all very strange circumstances, but not at all laughable, thought Don Juan. And then to be

attacked and torn by the dog — to be driven from the house in such a humiliating manner— in presence of his own troop, too !—Vizcarra— the vain-glorious Vizcarra—the great militario of the place—the hero of a hundred Indian battles that never were fought—he to be conquered by a cur ! Seriously, thought Don Juan, it was not an affair to laugh at. Vizcarra would have revenge, or try hard to obtain it.

The young ranchero had other unpleasant thoughts in connexion with this affair. What could have brought the Commandante to the rancho ? How had he found out that interesting abode,— that spot, sequestered as it was, that seemed to him (Don Juan) to be the centre of the world ? Who had directed him that way ? What brought the troop out of the main road, their usual route of march ?

These were questions which Don Juan

put to himself. To have asked them of Rosita would have been to disclose the existence of a feeling he would rather keep concealed—jealousy.

And jealous he was at the moment. The drink, she had served him of course,—the cigar, she had lit it for him—perhaps invited him in! Even now she appeared in the highest spirits, and not at all angry at the visit that had been paid her!

Don Juan's reflections had suddenly grown bitter, and he did not join in the laugh which his sweetheart was indulging in.

When after a short while she invited him in, his feelings took a turn, and he became himself again. He dismounted from his horse, and followed Rosita through the garden into the house.

The girl sat down by the loom and continued her work, while the young ranchero

was allowed to kneel upon the petaté beside her, and converse at will. There was no objection to his occasionally assisting her to straighten out the woof or untwist a fouled thread; and, on these occasions, their fingers frequently met, and seemed to remain longer in contact than was necessary for the unravelling of the knot.

But no one noticed all this. Rosita's mother was indulging in a siesta; and Cibolo, if he saw anything amiss, said nothing about it to any one, but wagged his tail, and looked good-humouredly at Don Juan, as if he entirely approved of the latter's conduct.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

When Vizcarra reached his sumptuous quarters, the first thing he did was to call for wine. It was brought, and he drank freely and with fierce determination.

He thought by that to drown his chagrin; and for a while he succeeded.

There is relief in wine, but it is only temporary: you may make jealousy drunk and oblivious, but you cannot keep it so. It will be sober as soon — ay, sooner than yourself. Not all the wine that was ever pressed from grapes can drown it into a complete oblivion.

Vizcarra's heart was filled by various pas-

sions. There was love—that is, such love as a libertine feels—jealousy; anger at the coarse handling he had experienced; wounded self-love, for with his gold-lace and fine plumes he believed himself a conqueror at first sight; and upon the top of all, bitter disappointment.

This last was the greater, that he did not see how his suit could be renewed. To attempt a similar visit would lead to similar chagrin, —perhaps worse.

It was plain the girl did not care for him, with all his fine feathers and exalted position. He saw that she was very different from the others with whom he had had dealings—different from the dark-eyed doncellas of the valley, most of whom, if not all, would have taken his onza without a word or a blush!

It was plain to him he could go no more to the rancho. Where, then, was he to meet her—to see her? He had ascertained that

she seldom came to the town—never to the amusements, except when her brother was at home. How, and where, then, was he to see her? His was a hopeless case—no opportunity of mending his first *faux pas*—none, any more than if the object of his pursuit was shut up in the cloisters of a nunnery! Hopeless, indeed! Thus ran his reflections.

Though uttering this phrase, he had no belief in its reality. He had no intention of ending the affair so easily. He—the lady-killer, Vizcarra—to fail in the conquest of a poor ranchera! He had never failed, and would not now. His vanity alone would have urged him farther in the affair; but he had a sufficient incentive to his strong passion,—for strong it had now grown. The opposition it had met—the very difficulty of the situation—only stimulated him to greater energy and earnestness.

Besides, jealousy was there, and that was another spur to his excited pride.

He was jealous of Don Juan. He had noticed the latter on the day of the fiesta. He had observed him in the company of the cibolero and his sister. He saw them talking, drinking, feasting together. He was jealous *then;* but that was light, for then he still anticipated his own easy and early triumph. That was quiet to the feeling that tortured him now—now that *he had failed* — now that he had seen in the very hour of his humiliation that same rival on his road to the rancho—welcome, no doubt—to be told of all that had happened—to join her in jeering laughter at his expense—to——Furies! the thought was intolerable.

For all that the Commandante had no idea of relinquishing his design. There were still means—foul, if not fair—if he could only think

of them. He wanted some head cooler than his own. Where was Roblado?

"Sergeant! tell Captain Roblado I wish to speak with him."

Captain Roblado was just the man to assist him in any scheme of the sort. They were equally villains as regarded women; but Vizcarra's *métier* was of a lighter sort — more of the genteel-comedy kind. His forte lay in the seductive process. He made love *à la Don Giovanni*, and carried hearts in what he deemed a legitimate manner; whereas Roblado resorted to any means that would lead most directly to the object—force, if necessary and safe. Of the two Roblado was the coarser villain.

As the Commandante had failed in his way, he was determined to make trial of any other his captain might suggest; and since the latter knew all the "love stratagems,"

both of civilised and savage life, he was just the man to suggest something.

It chanced that at this time Roblado wanted counsel himself upon a somewhat similar subject. He had proposed for Catalina, and Don Ambrosio had consented; but, to the surprise of all, the Señorita had rebelled! She did not say she would *not* accept Captain Roblado. That would have been too much of a defiance, and might have led to a summary interference of paternal authority. But she had appealed to Don Ambrosio for time—she was not ready to be married! Roblado could not think of time. He was too eager to be rich, but Don Ambrosio had listened to his daughter's appeal, and there lay the cause of the captain's trouble.

Perhaps the Commandante's influence with Don Ambrosio might be the means of overruling this decision and hastening the wished-

for nuptials. Roblado was therefore but too eager to lay his superior under an obligation.

Roblado having arrived, the Commandante explained his case, detailing every circumstance that had happened.

"My dear colonel, you did not go properly to work. I am astonished at that, considering your skill and experience. You dropped like an eagle upon a dove-cot, frightening the birds into their inaccessible holes. You should not have gone to the rancho at all."

"And how was I to see her?"

"In your own quarters; or elsewhere, as you might have arranged it."

"Impossible!—she would never have consented to come."

"Not by your sending for her direct; I know that."

"And how, then?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Roblado; "are

you so innocent as never to have heard of such a thing as an '*alcahuete?*'"

"Oh! true—but by my faith I never found use for one."

"No!—you in your fine style have deemed that a superfluity; but you might find use for one now. A very advantageous character that, I assure you—saves much time and trouble—diminishes the chances of failure, too. It's not too late. I advise you to try one. If that fails, you have still another string to your bow."

We shall not follow the conversation of these ruffians further. Enough to say that it led into details of their atrocious plans, which, for more than an hour, they sat concocting over their wine, until the whole scheme was set forth and placed in readiness to be carried out.

It *was* carried out, in fine, but led to a different ending from what either anticipated.

The "lady," who acted as "alcahuete," soon placed herself *en rapport* with Rosita; but her success was more equivocal than that of Vizcarra himself; in fact, I should rather say unequivocal, for there was no ambiguity about it.

As soon as her designs were made known to Rosita, the latter communicated them to her mother; and the scratches which the Commandante had received were nothing to those which had fallen to the lot of his proxy. The "alcahuete" had, in fact, to beg for her life before she was allowed to escape from the terrible Cibolo.

She would have sought legal revenge, but that the nature of her business made it wiser for her to pocket the indignities, and remain silent.

## CHAPTER XXV.

"Now, Roblado," asked the Commandante, "what is the other string to my bow?"

"Can't you guess, my dear colonel?"

"Not exactly," replied Vizcarra, though he well knew that he could. It was not long since the other string had been before his mind. He had even thought of it upon the day of his first defeat, and while his anger was hot and revengeful. And since then, too—often, often. His question was quite superfluous, for he well knew Roblado's answer would be "force."

It *was* "force." That was the very word. "How?"

"Take a few of your people, go by night,

and carry her off. What can be more simple? It would have been the proper way at first, with such a prude as she! Don't fear the result. It's not so terrible to them. I've known it tried before. Long ere the cibolero can return, she'll be perfectly reconciled, I warrant you."

"And if not?"

"If not, what have you to fear?"

"The talk, Roblado,—the talk."

"Bah! my dear colonel, you are timid in the matter. You have mismanaged it so far, but that's no reason you should not use tact for the future. It can be done by night. You have chambers here where no one is allowed to enter—some *without windows*, if you need them. Who's to be the wiser? Pick your men—those you can trust. You don't require a whole troop, and half-a-dozen onzas will tie as many tongues. It's as easy as

stealing a shirt. It is only stealing a chemisette. Ha! ha! ha!" and the ruffian laughed at his coarse simile and coarser joke, in which laugh he was joined by the Commandante.

The latter still hesitated to adopt this extreme measure. Not from any fineness of feeling. Though scarce so rough a villain as his companion, it was not delicacy of sentiment that restrained him now. He had been accustomed all his life to regard with heartless indifference the feelings of those he had wronged; and it was not out of any consideration for the future happiness or misery of the girl that he hesitated now. No, his motive was of a far different character. Roblado said true when he accused him of being timid. He was. It was sheer cowardice that stayed him.

Not that he feared any bodily punishment

would ever reach him for the act. He was too powerful, and the relatives of his intended victim too weak, to give him any apprehensions on that score. With a little policy he could administer death,—death to the most innocent of the people,—and give it a show of justice. Nothing was more easy than to cause suspicion of treason, incarcerate and slay—and particularly at that time, when both Pueblo revolt and Creole revolution threatened the Spanish rule in America.

What Vizcarra feared was "talk." Such an open rape could not well be kept secret for long. It would leak out, and once out it was too piquant a piece of scandal not to have broad fame. All the town would soon enjoy it, but there was a still more unpleasant probability. It might travel beyond the confines of the settlement, perhaps to high quarters, even to the Viceregal ear! There

find we the secret of the Commandante's fears.

Not, indeed, that the Viceregal court at the time was a model of morality. It would have been lenient enough to any act of despotism or debauchery done in a quiet way; but such an open act of rapine as that contemplated, on the score of policy could hardly be overlooked. In truth, Vizcarra's prudence had reason. He could not believe that it would be possible to keep the thing a secret. Some of the rascals employed might in the end prove traitor. True, they would be his own soldiers, and he might punish them for it at his will, but what satisfaction would that give him? It would be locking the stable after the steed had been stolen!

Even without their playing him false, how could he hope to keep the affair concealed?

First, there was an angry brother. True, he was out of the way; but there was a jealous lover on the ground, and the brother would return in time. The very act of the rape would point to him, Vizcarra. His visit, the attempt of the "alcahuete," and the carrying off of the girl, would all be pieced together, and put down to his credit, and the brother—such a one—and such a lover too—would not be silent with their suspicions. He might take measures to get rid of both, but these measures must needs be violent and dangerous.

Thus reasoned Vizcarra with himself, and thus he argued with Roblado. Not that he wished the latter to dissuade him—for the end he desired with all his heart—but in order that by their united wisdom some safer means of reaching it might be devised.

And a safer plan *was* devised. Roblado,

deeper in head, as well as bolder in heart, conceived it. Bringing his glass to the table with a sudden stroke, he exclaimed:—

"*Vamos,* Vizcarra! By the Virgin, I have it!"

"*Bueno—bravo!*

"You may enjoy your sweetheart within twenty-four hours, if you wish, and the sharpest scandal-monger in the settlement will be foiled; at least, you will have nothing to fear. What a devil of a lucky thought!—the very thing itself, amigo!"

"Don't keep me in suspense, camarado! your plan! your plan!"

"Stop till I've had a gulp of wine. The very thought of such a glorious trick makes me thirsty."

"Drink then, drink!" cried Vizcarra, filling out the wine, with a look of pleasant anticipation.

Roblado emptied the goblet at a draught, and then leaning nearer to the Commandante, he detailed what he had conceived in a low and confidential tone. It seemed to satisfy his listener, who, when the other had finished, uttered the word "Bravo!" and sprang to his feet like one who had received some joyful news.

He walked back and forth for some minutes in an excited manner, and then, bursting into a loud laugh, he cried out, "*Carrâmbo,* comrade! you *are* a tactician! The great Condé himself would not have shown such strategy. *Santissima Virgen!* it is the very master-stroke of design; and I promise, you, camarado, it shall have speedy execution."

"Why delay? Why not set about it at once?"

"True,—at once let us prepare for this *pleasant masquerade!*"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Circumstances were arising that would be likely to interrupt the Commandante and his captain in the execution of their design. At least, so it might have been supposed. In less than twenty-four hours after the conversation described, a rumour of Indian incursions was carried to the town, and spread through every house in the valley. The rumour said said that a band of "Indios bravos,"—whether Apache, Yuta, or Comanche, was not stated, — had made their appearance near the settlement, in full *war-paint and costume!*

This of course denoted hostile intentions, and an attack might be expected in some

part of the settlement. The first rumour was followed by one still more substantial,—that the Indians had attacked some shepherds on the upper plain, not far from the town itself. The shepherds had escaped, but their dogs had been killed, and a large number of sheep driven off to the mountain-fastnesses of the marauders!

This time the report was more definite. The Indians were Yutas, and belonged to a band of that tribe that had been hunting to the east of the Pecos, and who had no doubt resolved upon this plundering expedition before returning to their home near the heads of the Del Norte. The shepherds had seen them distinctly, and knew the Yuta *paint*.

That the Indians were Yutas was probable enough. The same tribe had lately made a foray upon the settlements in the fine valley

of Taos. They had heard of the prosperous condition of San Ildefonso, and hence their hostile visit. Besides both Apaches and Comanches were *en paz* with the settlement, and had for some years confined themselves to ravaging the provinces of Coahuila and Chihuahua. No provocation had been given to these tribes to recommence hostilities, nor had they given any signs of such an intention.

Upon the night of the same day in which the sheep were carried off, a more important robbery was committed. That took place in the settlement itself. A large number of cattle were driven off from a grazing-farm near the lower end of the valley. The Indians had been seen in the act, but the frightened vaqueros were but too glad to escape, and shut themselves up in the buildings of the farm.

No murders had as yet been committed, but that was because no resistance had been made to the spoliations. Nor had any houses been yet attacked. Perhaps the Indians were only a small band; but there was no knowing how soon their numbers might be increased, and greater outrages attempted.

The people of the valley, as well as those in the town, were now in a state of excitement. Consternation prevailed everywhere. Those who lived in the scattered ranchos forsook their homes during the night, and betook themselves to the town and the larger haciendas for shelter. These last were shut up as soon as darkness approached, and regular sentries posted upon their azoteas, who kept watch until morning. The terror of the inhabitants was great,—the greater because for a long period they had lived on good terms with the Indios

bravos, and a visit from them was novel as unexpected.

No wonder that they were alarmed. They had cause for it. They well knew that in these hostile incursions the savage enemy acts with the utmost barbarity,—murdering the men, and sparing only the younger women, whom they carry off to a cruel captivity. They well knew this, for at that very date there were thousands of their countrywomen in the hands of the wild Indians, lost to their families and friends for ever! No wonder that there was fear and trembling.

The Commandante seemed particularly on the alert. At the head of his troops he scoured the neighbouring plains, and made incursions towards the spurs of the mountains. At night his patrols were in constant motion up and down the valley. The people were admonished to keep within their houses

and barricade their doors in case of attack. All admired the zeal and activity of their military protectors.

The Commandante won golden opinions daily. This was the first real opportunity he had had of showing them his "pluck," for there had been no alarm of Indians since he arrived. In the time of his predecessor several had taken place, and on these occasions it was remembered that the troops, instead of going abroad to search for the "barbaros," shut themselves up in the garrison till the latter were gone clear out of the valley, after having carried off all the cattle they could collect! What a contrast in the new Commandante! What a brave officer was Colonel Vizcarra!

This excitement continued for several days. As yet no murders had been committed, nor any women carried off; and as the Indians

had only appeared in the night, the probability was that they were in but small force, —some weak band of robbers. Had it been otherwise, they would have long since boldly shown themselves by daylight, and carried on their depredations on a much larger scale.

During all this time, the mother and sister of the cibolero lived in their lone rancho without any protection, and were, perhaps, less in dread of the Indians than any other family in the whole valley. This was to be attributed to several causes. First, their training, which had taught them to make light of dangers that terrified their less courageous neighbours. Secondly, their poor hut was not likely to tempt the cupidity of Indian robbers, whose design was evidently plunder. There were too many well-stocked ranchos a little farther up the valley. The Indians would not be likely to molest them.

But there was still a better reason for this feeling of confidence on their part, and that was somewhat of a family secret. Carlos having traded with all the neighbouring tribes was known to the Indians, and was on terms of friendship with nearly every one of their chiefs. One cause of this friendship was, that Carlos was known to them as an *American*. Such was their feeling in regard to Americans that, at this time, and for a long period after, both the trappers and traders of that nation could pass through the whole Apache and Comanche range in the smallest parties without molestation, while large caravans of Mexicans would be attacked and robbed! It was only long after, that these tribes assumed a fierce hostility against the Saxon whites; and this was brought about by several acts of barbarism committed by parties of the whites themselves.

In his dealings with the Indios bravos, then, the cibolero had not forgotten his little rancho at home; and he had always counselled his mother and sister not to fear the Indians in his absence, assuring them that these would not molest them.

The only tribe with which Carlos was not on friendly terms was the Jicarilla, a small and miserable band that lived among the mountains north-east of Santa Fé. They were a branch of the Apaches, but lived apart, and had little in common with the great freebooters of the south—the *Mezcaleros* and *Wolf-eaters*.

For these reasons, then, the little Rosita and her mother, though not entirely without apprehension, were yet less frightened by the current rumours of the time than their neighbours.

Every now and then Don Juan rode

over to the rancho, and advised them to come and stay at his house—a large strong building well defended by himself and his numerous peons. But the mother of Rosita only laughed at the fears of Don Juan; and Rosita, herself, from motives of delicacy, of course refused to accede to his proposal.

* * * * *

It was the third night from the time the Indians had been first heard of. The mother and daughter had laid aside their spindle and loom, and were about to retire to their primitive couches on the earthen floor, when Cibolo was seen to spring from his petaté, and rush towards the door, growling fiercely.

His growl increased to a bark—so earnest, that it was evident some one was outside. The door was shut and barred; but the old woman, without even inquiring who

was there, pulled out the bar, and opened the door.

She had scarcely shown herself when the wild whoop of Indians rang in her ears, and a blow from a heavy club prostrated her upon the threshold. Spite the terrible onset of the dog, several savages, in all the horrid glare of paint and feathers, rushed into the house yelling fearfully, and brandishing their weapons; and in less than five minutes time, the young girl, screaming with terror, was borne in their arms to the outside of the rancho, and there tied upon the back of a mule.

The few articles which the Indians deemed of any value, were carried away with them; and the savages, after setting fire to the rancho, made off in haste.

Rosita saw the blaze of the rancho as she sat tied upon the mule. She had seen

her mother stretched upon the door-step, and was in fact dragged over her apparently lifeless form; and the roof was now in flames!

"My poor mother!" she muttered in her agony. "O God! O God! what will become of my poor mother?"

* * * * *

Almost simultaneously with this attack, or a little after it, the Indians appeared before the house of the ranchero, Don Juan; but, after yelling around it and firing several arrows over the azotea and against the door, they retired.

Don Juan was apprehensive for his friends at the rancho. As soon as the Indians had gone away from about his own premises, he stole out; and, trusting to the darkness, made his way in that direction.

He had not gone far, before the blaze

of the building came under his eyes, causing the blood to rush cold through his veins.

He did not stop. He was a-foot, but he was armed, and he dashed madly forward resolved to defend Rosita, or die!

In a few minutes he stood before the door of the rancho; and there, to his horror, lay the still senseless form of the mother, her wild and ghastly features illuminated by the blaze from the roof. The fire had not yet reached her, though in a few moments more she would have been buried in the flames!

Don Juan drew her forth into the garden, and then rushed frantically around calling on Rosita.

But there was no reply. The crackling blaze—the sighing of the night wind—the hooting of the cliff owl, and the howling of the coyoté, alone answered his anxious calls.

After remaining until all hope had vanished, he turned towards the prostrate body, and knelt down to examine it. To his surprise there was still life, and after her lips had been touched with water, the old woman showed symptoms of recovery. She had only been stunned by the heavy blow.

Don Juan at length lifted her in his arms, and taking the well-known path returned with his burden, and with a heavy heart, to his own house.

* * * * *

Next morning the news of the affair was carried through all the settlement, adding to the terror of the inhabitants. The Commandante with a large troop galloped conspicuously through the town; and after much loud talk and empty demonstrations, went off on the trail which the Indians were supposed to have taken.

Long before night the troopers returned with their usual report, "*los barbaros no pudimos alcanzar.*" (We could not overtake the savages.)

They said that they had followed the trail to the Pecos, where the Indians had crossed, and that the savages had continued on towards the Llano Estacado.

This piece of news gave some relief, for it was conjectured, if the marauders had gone in that direction their plundering would end. They had probably proceeded to join the rest of their tribe, known to be somewhere in that quarter.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

Vizcarra and his gay lancers passed up the valley, on their return from the pursuit at an early hour of the evening.

Scarcely had a short hour elapsed, when another cavalcade, dusty and way-worn, was seen moving along the same road, and heading toward the settlements. It could hardly be termed a cavalcade, as it consisted of an atajo of pack-mules, with some carretas drawn by oxen. One man only was on horseback, who, by his dress and manner, could be recognised as the owner of the atajo.

Despite the fatigue of a long march,

despite the coating of dust, which covered both horse and rider, it was not difficult to tell who the horseman was. Carlos the cibolero!

Thus far had he reached on his homeward way. Another stretch of five miles along the dusty road, and he would halt before the door of his humble rancho. Another hour, and his aged mother, his fond sister, would fling themselves into his arms, and receive his affectionate embrace!

What a surprise it would be! They would not be expecting him for weeks—long weeks.

And what a surprise he had for them in another way! His wonderful luck! The superb mulada and cargo,—quite a little fortune indeed! Rosita should have a new dress,—not a coarse woolen nagua but one of silk—real foreign silk, and a manta, and

the prettiest pair of satin slippers—she should wear fine stockings on future fiesta days, she should be worthy of his friend Don Juan. His old mother, too—she should drink tea, coffee, or chocolate, which she preferred—no more *atole* for her!

The rancho was rude and old—it should come down, and another and better one go up in its place—no—it would serve as a stable for the horse, and the new rancho should be built beside it. In fact the sale of his mulada would enable him to buy a good strip of land, and stock it well too.

What was to hinder him to turn ranchero, and farm or graze on his own account? It would be far more respectable, and would give him a higher standing in the settlement. Nothing to hinder him. He would do so; but first one more journey to the plains—one more visit to his Waco friends, who had

promised him —— Ha! it was this very promise that was the keystone of all his hopes.

The silk dress for Rosita, the luxuries for his old mother, the new house, the farm, were all pleasant dreams to Carlos; but he indulged a dream of a still pleasanter nature—a dream that eclipsed them all; and his hopes of its realisation lay in that one more visit to the country of the Wacoes.

Carlos believed that his poverty alone was the barrier that separated him from Catalina. He knew that her father was not, properly speaking, one of the "rico" class. True, he was a rico now: but only a few years ago he had been a poor "gambucino"—poor as Carlos himself. In fact, they had once been nearer neighbours; and in his earlier days Don Ambrosio had esteemed the boy Carlos fit company for the little Catalina.

What objection, then, could he have to

the cibolero—provided the latter could match him in fortune? "Certainly none," thought Carlos. "If I can prove to him that I, too, am a 'rico,' he will consent to my marrying Catalina. And why not? The blood in my veins — so says my mother — is as good as that of any hidalgo. And, if the Wacoes have told me the truth, one more journey and Carlos the cibolero will be able to show as much gold as Don Ambrosio the miner!"

These thoughts had been running in his mind throughout the whole of his homeward journey. Every day—every hour—did he build his aëry castles; every hour did he buy the silk dress for Rosita—the tea, coffee, and chocolate, for his mother—every hour did he erect the new rancho, buy the farm, show a fortune in gold-dust, and demand Catalina from her father! *Chateaux en Espagne!*

Now that he was close to his home, these pleasant visions grew brighter and seemed nearer; and the countenance of the cibolero was radiant with joy. What a fearful change was soon to pass over it!

Several times he thought of spurring on in advance, the sooner to enjoy the luxury of his mother's and sister's welcome; and then he changed his mind again.

"No," muttered he to himself; "I will stay by the atajo. I will better enjoy the triumph. We shall all march up in line, and halt in front of the rancho. They will think I have some stranger with me, to whom belong the mules! When I announce them as my own they will fancy that I have turned Indian, and made a *raid* on the southern provinces, with my stout retainers. Ha! ha! ha!" And Carlos laughed at the conceit.

"Poor little Rosy!" he continued; "she *shall* marry Don Juan this time! I won't withhold my consent any longer! It would be better, too. He 's a bold fellow, and can protect her while I 'm off on the plains again: though one more journey, and I have done with the plains. One more journey, and I shall change my title from Carlos the cibolero to Señor Don Carlos R——. Ha! ha! ha!"

Again he laughed at the prospect of becoming a "rico," and being addressed as "Don Carlos."

"Very odd," thought he, "I don't meet any one! I don't see a soul upon the road up or down. Yet it 's not late—the sun 's above the bluff still. Where can the people be? And yet the road 's covered thick with fresh horse-tracks! Ha! the troops have been here! they have just passed up! But

that 's no reason why the people are not abroad; and I don't see even a straggler! Now I could have believed there was an alarm of Indians had I not seen these tracks; but I know very well that, were the Apaches on their war-trail, my Commandante and his whiskerandos would never have ventured so far from the Presidio—that I know.

"Well, there 's something extraordinary! I can't make it out. Perhaps they're all up to the town at some fiesta. Anton, my boy, you know all the feast-days! Is this one?"

"No, master."

"And where are all the folks?"

"Can't guess, master! Strange we don't see some!"

"So I was thinking. You don't suppose there have been wild Indians in the neighbourhood?"

"No, master—*mira!* They 're the tracks of the 'lanzeros'—only an hour ago. No Indians where they are!"

As Antonio said this, both his accent and look had an expression which guided his master to the true meaning of his words, which might otherwise have been ambiguous. He did not mean that the fact of the lancers having been on the ground would prevent the Indians from occupying it, but exactly the reverse. It was, not "lancers no Indians," but "Indians no lancers," that Antonio meant.

Carlos understood him; and, as this had been his own interpretation of the tracks, he burst out into a fit of laughter.

Still no travellers appeared, and Carlos did not like it. As yet he had not thought of any misfortune to those he loved; but the unpeopled road had an air of loneliness about it, and did not seem to welcome him.

As he passed on a feeling of sadness came stealing over him, which after it had fairly taken possession he could not get rid of.

He had not yet passed a settlement. There were none before reaching his own rancho, which, as already stated, was the lowest in the valley. Still the inhabitants fed their flocks far below that; and it was usual, at such an hour, to see them driving their cattle home. He neither saw cattle nor vaqueros.

The meadows on both sides, where cattle used to graze, were empty! What could it mean?

As he noticed these things an indefinite sense of uneasiness and alarm began to creep over him; and this feeling increased until he had arrived at the turning which led to his own rancho.

At length he headed around the forking angle of the road; and, having passed the little

coppices of evergreen oaks, came within sight of the house. With a mechanical jerk he drew his horse upon his haunches, and sat in the saddle with open jaw and eyes glaring and protruded!

The rancho he could not see—for the covering interposed columns of the cacti—but through the openings along their tops a black line was visible, that had an unnatural look, and a strange film of smoke hung over the azotea!

"God of heaven! what can it mean?" cried he, with a choking voice; but, without waiting to answer himself, he lanced the flanks of his horse till the animal shot off like an arrow.

The intervening ground was passed; and, flinging himself from the saddle, the cibolero rushed through the cactus-fence.

* * * * *

The atajo soon after came up. Antonio hurried through; and there, inside the hot, smoke-blackened walls, half-seated, half-lying on the banqueta, was his master, his head hanging forward upon his breast, and both hands nervously twisted in the long curls of his hair.

Antonio's foot-fall caused him to look up —only for a moment.

"O God! My mother—my sister!" and, as he repeated the words, his head once more fell forward, while his broad breast rose and fell in convulsed heaving. It was an hour of mortal agony; for some secret instinct had revealed to him the terrible truth.

END OF VOL. I.

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